

Hugo Santander's first poetry collection, *Hymns to Death*, is a great elegy to the death of his little sister when she was two years old and he was ten, a tragedy that left him "orphaned" and forever changed his life and his way of seeing the world. It is a mourning that left an open wound for a long time, whose scar still stings. It is also a travel log through space and time, for the author is a voluntary exile who has traveled the world and lived for a long time outside his country, Colombia: Cartagena and the Caribbean coast, European countries (England, France), Asia, and the United States are the settings of these wanderings; over a time span ranging from the 1970s, the age of his childhood and of his fraternal loss, to the 2000s, his latest wanderings. The death of his sister seems to have been one of the unconscious triggers of his roaming and of his spiritual search. Indeed, the collection is also the story of a path toward encountering God and communion with Christ and with the Virgin.



*In your livid complexion the affection
Unscathed as a cloudless twilight
Wood for the walls, the mountains
Of the eternal matter, the feeling...
No one perishes until his beloved one dies...*

"Hymns to Death" is a book that contains distilled experiences and reflections of a skin-deep sensitivity, expressed in a simple and emotional language, which shows the maturity of a poet who unites extreme sensuality with an original spirituality. More than "Hymns to Death", this collection of poems should be titled "Hymns to Love"

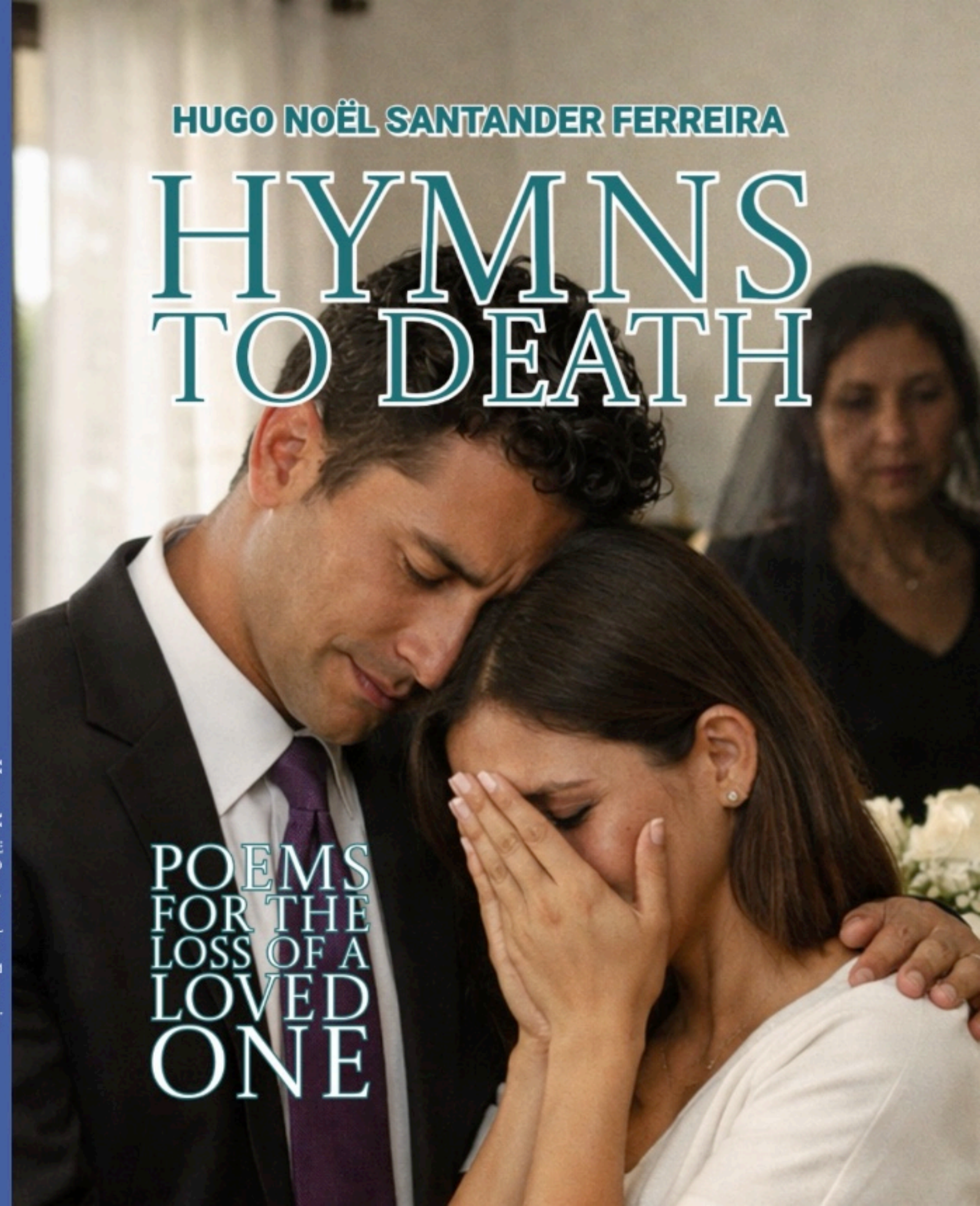
Hymns to Death

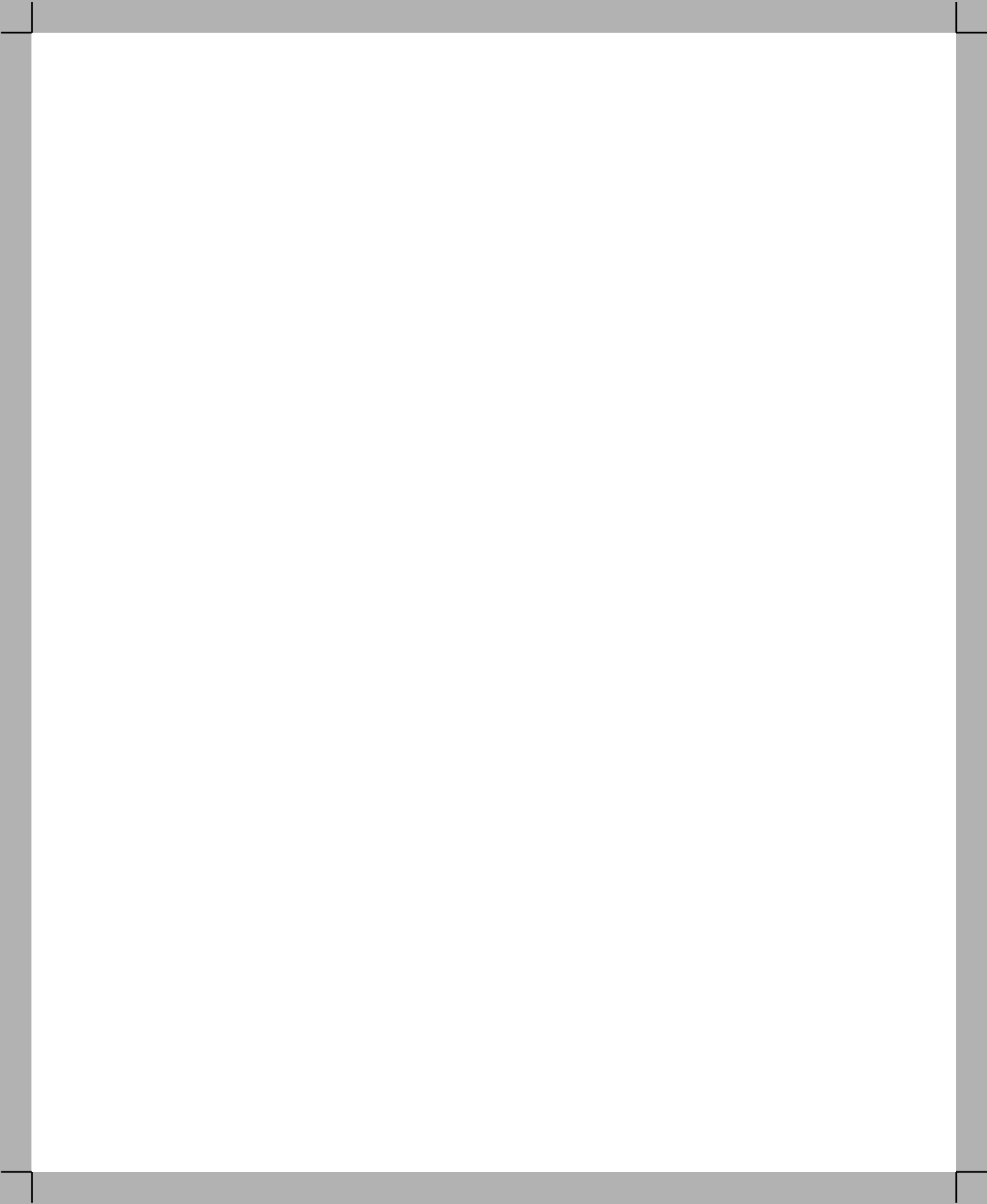
Hugo Noël Santander Ferreira

HUGO NOËL SANTANDER FERREIRA

HYMNS TO DEATH

POEMS
FOR THE
LOSS OF A
LOVED
ONE





Hugo Noël Santander Ferreira

HYMNS TO DEATH

POEMS



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*To Yaneth Cristina Santander
(1977–1979)*

Together we wove the house, the path,
the neighborhood for two years that went away
to remain forever, a love that waits
in the eyes that once beheld yours.

At ten years old my sister suffered
from gastroenteritis, a treacherous affliction;
the fire of her fever did not subside,
and I was kept away from her presence.

I prayed, stricken, through her agony
until at dawn, breathless,
I knew my little one no longer suffered;

the firmament fell forever,
my heart turned into a thorn,
the sun scorched every seed.



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PROLOGUE BY FRANCIS MESTRIES

Hugo Santander's first poetry collection, *Hymns to Death*, is a great elegy to the death of his little sister when she was two years old and he was ten, a tragedy that left him "orphaned" and forever changed his life and his way of seeing the world. It is a mourning that left an open wound for a long time, whose scar still stings. It is also a travel log through space and time, for the author is a voluntary exile who has traveled the world and lived for a long time outside his country, Colombia: Cartagena and the Caribbean coast, European countries (England, France), Asia, and the United States are the settings of these wanderings; over a time span ranging from the 1970s, the age of his childhood and of his fraternal loss, to the 2000s, his latest wanderings. The death of his sister seems to have been one of the unconscious triggers of his roaming and of his spiritual search. Indeed, the collection is also the story of a path toward encountering God and communion with Christ and with the Virgin.

In *Kings of the World*, the poet speaks of his love for his sister, and of her sudden illness and death. The death of his sister was the death of the child he was, of that paradise of childhood where he lived happily, in total empathy with his sister, who was the ray of sunlight of the family, and in harmony with the universe:

*Your unexpected departure is my departure
Where have you gone?
Your embraces, your answers still return
Where, little sister, my friend?
Why did you come, Cristina?
To suffer the universe, perhaps?*

In another poem he recounts his sister's illness, her medical torment in the hospital, and their separation, as if a piece of his own body were being torn away:

*We saw her face furrowed by serpents,
Needles wounding her arms,
Electrodes piercing her bronchi (...)
The universe fell silent, the sun broke forth
And she, bewildered, left her smiling eyes*

Indeed, despite incantations, prayers, and omens, the weavers of the shroud completed their task.

*Night fell upon her
and I in her, helpless
Each night brings me closer to her arms*

Night invaded her and invaded the entire world of the poet, and since then night is the place where she visits him, and with the rain she draws smiles and butterflies on the window. His love will endure beyond the death of his sister, for Love is more lasting than life and death, and allows man to transcend his finitude and reach eternity:

*Life passes; love, instead, is forever
Beyond, your innocence is reborn at dawn
Over gray laughter and bitter nights*

In Winter and Spring of 1997, the author's vision of death becomes universal, revealing through his aimless wanderings across the world his essential estrangement, his fleeting amorous encounters, and his condition as an exile from happiness:

*I sailed across a sickened globe
Coupling upon stone tumuli
The beaches that hosted their dances destroyed*

And he concludes with this harrowing lament:

No one perishes until his beloved dies

This awareness of death "contaminates" everything; all becomes relative, even the fleeting nature of kingdoms and states, through the refrain:

How many nations have died, how many survive.

"Epitaph" is an elegy-prayer to his sister and to Love, for his sister was the embodiment of Love, which erased the terrible presence of war and its hecatombs. "Mamita Carmen," his grandmother, is the intuition of the certainty of reunion with his sister in the afterlife, as she opened her arms to her in paradise. She was the maternal figure, embodiment of goodness,

who resisted misfortune and the gossip of the pious, recalling Los maderos de San Juan by Silva. In Praise of Death, death becomes the gateway to eternal life, freeing man from his prison of alien and presumptuous dust; his safe-conduct to reunite with his sister. One thinks of Jorge Manrique and his Coplas on the Death of his Father, and also of León de Greiff and his poem Lady Death.

On the Greek Shores employs the goddesses and heroines of Greek mythology as rhetorical figures. In Gea, the poet uses the allegory of the Earth goddess and compares his separation from the beloved woman with the abandonment of Mother Earth by humankind, who mistreat and insult her with "the imposture of cities." A melancholic vision of love stands out in these poems, as the author experiences in his exiles clandestine, fleeting, or impossible loves.

Antigone is the symbol of the duty of memory, of honoring the dead; for Hugo she is the image of his frustrated adolescent love that marked a turning point in his life. Likewise, in Dido, the poet identifies with the defeated queen of Carthage who laments the destruction of her city and the death of her love; for the author, she embodies the innocence of "youth, which is a boat that does not return."

In Cities that Banished Me, Hugo Santander leads us through his wanderings across cities of the world. He employs the anthropomorphization of the cities he traveled through, turning them into women, as Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Cendrars, Eliot, López Velarde, among others, did.

He begins with Bucaramanga, his birthplace, which he recalls as a lost Eden, home of the tutelary shadow of his ancestors, of his first stirring of love, a feeling he experienced for his sister, soon gone. The eternal wandering Ulysses longs for his Ithaca, his root and his home:

*Whose souls from the valley of the dead
Guide my words from safe windows*

And where the source of his memory remains alive, the memory of his sister who left him the revelation of love and eternity:

The infinite springs from the first trunk

Cartagena is a young woman he loved in his adolescence, whom he longs for by evoking the magic of nights and dawns on the beach; yet this pure love was shipwrecked in the underworld destiny of this city of perdition. Bogotá is the great Whore, the city of hypocritical oligarchs who kill with the law in hand, of petty lawyers sent to legalize dispossession, of bigots who sanctify their orgies, of sanctimonious drunkards, a putrefied

city that staggers forward yet refuses to die. In Philadelphia, the author's disenchantment seeps through: dazzled by its luminous towers, he became a lackey of the powerful, while remaining an immigrant with WASP pretensions in a city built upon the bodies of slaves, illegals, and stowaways. Likewise, in Chicago the poet suffers his condition as a prisoner in "a country of prisoners," who internalize dungeons and batons; condemned to survive in slums, he is consoled by "whores and merchants" who lure him with their "baits" or "poisons," and he takes refuge in the memory of "his home," even if it is another hell. Porto is a city of palaces and decaying glories, whose nobility fascinated him at first, yet it is a city "where no one in its domains was free." Córdoba, on the other hand, is a sensual lover with a coppery belly and golden towers (breasts), where the poet exorcises the infamous history of the Conquest and refreshes himself at the course of the great river fed by its three tributaries: Gothic, Sephardic, and Muslim. The "World Trade Center" of New York is a mirage that gives unemployed undocumented people the illusion of sharing in the imperial vertigo of domination, "at the summit of all nations," without realizing that, like the Statue of Liberty that "melts its lime into the sea," these towers would soon be brought down by "other heretics." In Bishkek, the poet laments the fall of this once opulent city that was a "silk empire," and the collapse of ideologies of social justice that sought to transform it but ended in corruption, as well as its present condition—impoverished and subservient to the richest power. Wanderings across the world that leave experiences and adventures, but also a disenchanted взгляд on the countries of the first world, and the sting of longing for the cities of his childhood.

The religious fiber of the poet unfolds in the following section of the book: Prayers. The author recalls his biblical readings and the great Spanish mystical poets to express his deep faith. Thus, Gratia plena is a hymn to Mary, refuge of the author in his misfortunes, protector in desperate cases:

*When the graves were sprouting
you were always in silence*

In the poem Dominus Tecum, Hugo uses metaphors of nature, as in the Song of Songs and in Saint John of the Cross, to express the physical and spiritual beauty of the Virgin:

*Before me you shone in calm;
Every mother could radiate the moon
In your light the flutter of birds*

*The caress of the deer in your hair
The smoothness and fragrance of the olive tree
Are glimmers of a peaceful day*

The capricious and voluptuous character of the author calms before her, realizing that the flesh is weak and that humility before her is the key to resurrection, for she is "Love, love without walls." In Confession, the journey is a metaphor for the passage of time, which the mirror engraves upon the author's face. But the mirror is also a wardrobe that stores his past ages, a door to his double, his "doppelganger," who remained in the past, beside a French woman he loved in the south of France. Finally, the mirror hides a "soul that persists" beyond time. Adonai is a poem of gratitude to Adonai, Christ, God, whose vision illuminated the poet in the heights of the Andes. Facing the dangers of his adventurous life, from which he emerged unharmed by entrusting himself to Him, he cast off the cloak of romantic youthful pride to take refuge in His protection:

*You alone, Adonai, saved me from the dagger;
You granted me wisdom, Adonai*

Finally, Penance is a hymn to physical love, against the hypocrisy of the doctors of the faith, the bigots and the devout; the poet invokes Swedenborg to affirm that physical ecstasy does not contradict mystical love for God; they may even be confused—not in their object, but in their imprint on the senses and the mind, and in their artistic expression, as in Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross.

Chance and Mist concludes the book with reflections on the meaning—or lack thereof—of life, for man remains a wolf to man. In Wounds, amid the mist, at the mercy of shadows, Hugo discovers that behind the wounds life has given him rise his thorns. Ennui is another name for Baudelaire's Spleen; it evokes drinks, cigarettes, weariness, and disenchantment: humanity is summed up in "the dagger and adultery," and life does not resemble the promises of youthful love, leaving only disgust and boredom—the hangover of a dissipated life. The Promise is a meditation on the unconsciousness and incompleteness of the human being, who destroys what he loves:

*I created and did not believe
I believed and did not create
I loved and unloved*

Only suffering leaves man lessons of life:

There are secrets that only affliction reveals

In Coincidences, the poet finds meaning in the beauty of simple, everyday things:

*The universe is the most beautiful absurdity
that preserves the rose and its presence*

The author sought to forget the painful and tender memory of his dead sister by mingling with the beings of the underworld—illegal immigrants, vagrants, pimps, and prostitutes—until he understood what is essential:

Upon glass we built

Hymns to Death is a book that distills the experiences and reflections of a deeply sensitive soul, expressed in a simple and emotive language that reveals the maturity of a poet who unites extreme sensuality with an original spirituality. More than Hymns to Death, this collection should be titled Hymns to Love.

Francis Mestries
Mexico City, September 2015

AUTHOR'S PREAMBLE

This volume brings together five poetry collections that I composed in solitary conversations. I discovered literature, like almost everyone, at school and through a collection of children's books that my parents gave us: beautifully illustrated in hardcover, their pages alternated chronicles by Louis Perú de Lacroix with poems by García Lorca, popular riddles, fables by Perrault, and tales from the *Arabian Nights*, readings that nourished my imagination. At sixteen, I won a poetry contest dedicated to the Virgin at Colegio San Pedro Claver in Bucaramanga; two years later, I published my first poem at the Faculty of Social Communication of Universidad Javeriana.

In mid-1998, I arrived in Portugal, where we rented an apartment overlooking the Douro River, which in Spanish translates as "River of Gold," and which—there are no coincidences—is the name of the river that bathes the slopes of my hometown, Bucaramanga. There I wrote, the following year, on March twelfth, *Hymns to Death*.

On the Greek Shores is a song of love through weddings, adventures, and idylls; *Prayers*, written upon the beautiful meadows on the outskirts of Manchester, translates my conversations of solitude in God; *Cities that Banished Me* is a study of the prejudices of the societies I visited; *Chance and the Mist*, a diary of poetic intuitions that the years have confirmed.

I thank the poet Francis Mestries, who, after my reading at the Fusagasugá Poetry Festival, approached me to tell me what every poet longs to hear: that my verses had moved him.

I thank Zorayda and Flavio, my parents, who supported me in the first edition of this book, and my wife, Leyla Margarita Tobías Buelvas, who made this second edition possible.

Sincelejo, April 2026



HYMNS TO DEATH



KINGS OF THE WORLD

Age does not diminish the intensity of feeling
—Lautréamont

I

You and I, fragile clusters
that blossomed in the cracks
of a sinister city
of merchants and dancers

Upon your pallid skin, affection
unharmful like a cloudless twilight,
timber of walls, the mountains
of eternal matter, feeling

Your sudden departure is my departure
Where have you gone?
Your embraces, your answers, still return
Where, little sister, my friend?

Why did you come, Cristina?
To suffer the universe, perhaps?
The forests, the cities—were they ours?
My tears still fall within your days

Did you love—were you born, then died?
Life passes; love, instead, is forever
Beyond, your innocence is reborn at dawn
over grey laughter and bitter nights

II

In cardboard cruises we sailed the sea
upon a platform as vast as the Caribbean
Yellow birds cried beneath a blue sky
sweetened by fallen fruits

My arms were trails of sand,
columns to which you clung
on hearing rumors, on glimpsing
ogres and gorgons, mirages on the water

In your immense life lies my childhood
not in the dark days, set apart,
nor in condemnations, nor in street brawls,
nor in distant public executions

The face I discover in the mirror is чужер to me
Mine I lost one morning in March
on the outskirts of a suburb;
its firmament, its waters, still await it

Shamed and tempered
upon the traces of Gethsemane,
with that blood upon that sand
I rediscover your affection in other faces

Other voices will remember you, Cristina
Without your agony I would never have understood
the immeasurable nature of love
nor the wide meadows of the eternal



SUMMER AND WINTER OF 1997

*First learn to love one living man;
Then mayst thou think upon the dead.*
—William Wordsworth

Barefoot, upon the Caribbean shores,
Cristina walked the world in little steps;
her legs, splashed by the waves,
stirred the solemn foam of a tranquil ocean

Holding my hand, my little girl stepped into the cold water
only to return trembling to my arms
How sometimes, weary of her games,
Cristina would fall asleep upon my lap
How the universe cherished us:
I, her guardian; she, learning

How many nations have died,
how many endure

Hands that build cities
and carry borders from one tongue to another,
with full indifference, peace, disputes
renewed, estranged from coin and purse

They accept the harshness of a schedule
and take refuge in their past,
like prey within its lair
And if the silence of the stars consoles him,
he is immigrant or criminal through his fears,
among bodies that prolong another day,
estranged from the peace of cypresses

How many nations have died,
how many endure

Our happiness under the shelter of her absence,
I sailed journeys across a stricken globe,
copulating upon mounds of stone
The beaches that held their dances lie in ruin
Agony is each sunset
Her ethereal body, among white fabrics, implores us
from the stillness of her boundless refuge,
and the wallflowers grow, the festivities persist,
lovers wound, wars revive,
and our future advances toward the grave,
a door without feast, lover, or war

How many nations have died,
how many endure

The fear of those who celebrate you
passes like the anguish of sustenance,
from the indigenous dust of Chicamocha,
herald of conquerors and their servants
I submerge my neck in lucid waters
and proclaim the resurrection of the world
The impurity and sweetness of religions leaves
to reconcile itself with the silence of the stars
following her steps upon the shore of the Dead Sea:
the single mystery — her absence

How many nations have died,
how many endure



HER DEATH

O peace, it is a day of pain
—Tennyson

At birth, cruel potions entered her blood
Her gentle face grew thin in emergency wards
A lamb her shepherd delivered and sacrificed
for the pardon of his transgressions

In childhood, my sister set her course
in the stream that runs toward the sea to settle its banks
Each summer, the shadows return to us
her steps, by her hand, across an abandoned park

Innocent, grateful, eager to follow her games
I bid her farewell from the doorway
The day shone without foreboding
She waved to me lightly before continuing on

My father brought her to the hospital that morning
Upon arrival, she played with other children
Her eyes searched for me; a doctor covered her
before leading her, fading, to her room

Covered by a sheet of elk and gazelles
we saw her face traced with serpents,
needles piercing her arms,
electrodes crossing through her chest

The nurses kept me from Cristina
when we needed each other most
I was her guide, the one who dressed her in the mornings
she my accomplice, the one who shielded me

Her pouting, far from me, would cease
withered like a field without rain
In the densest mist from the Nile basin
the oldest sorrow simmered its cold breath

Her bloodless body filled a wooden box
like a castaway recovered from the open sea
The universe fell silent, the sun broke forth
and she, bewildered, left her smiling eyes

The rose-tinted glow of dawn passes
like her faint face before my window
How we then turned
to the Immaculate Virgin for comfort

The weavers of shrouds ignored my cry
In my body, every parting was distant
That one, the last night of childhood
we prayed for her future, we held back the darkness

Returning home, on a thirteenth of March
the wind bent the trees as we passed
How they spoke to me of rest
gentle to those who suffer

My lungs yielded before a convulsing body
before a crowd murmuring ancestral words
Thus we endured the helplessness of her absence
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum

Anguish went searching for her
Her lace dress, her small boots, slipped away
Night fell upon her
and I within it, helpless

Twenty years later the sun declines
and her golden skin shines beneath the sky
New efforts give way to further efforts
Each night draws me nearer to her arms

The effervescent moon filters from nothingness, the firmament
And Jeannette Cristina returns with her laughter
It rains, and I trace my window with her
with butterflies the sky has given us
with dragonflies from games long past

And so you preserve me, a child
in cities bewildered by my beliefs
I shall be the wind that, in its turning,
consoles each heart in its secrets

Each day your absence clothes me
swift in sleepless languor
Each day you overflow with sweetness

The emptiness of uncertain days
leaves us a bittersweet taste of hope
which my sorrows pour into a feast
for the gentle ruminants of Vishnu

No one dies until the beloved dies



LITTLE HANDS TO MAKE THE HEART BEAT

*For while her days are days of weeping
Thou, in peace, in silence sleeping
In some still world, unknown, remote*
—S.T. Coleridge

The next morning I woke undone
from a dream in which you died
I rose and found your room empty

She has left me, yes, my sister has left me

My gaze fell upon your unmade bed
like rain upon the storm
unable to cross walls or distances

She has left me, yes, my sister has left me

For while our days are days of weeping
you, in peace, in silence, asleep
in some still unknown, distant world

She has left me, yes, my sister has left me

My father climbed the stairs
and held me without speaking his grief

How our heart needed
your little hands to beat



ONE AND THE SAME SHADOW

And they were one single long shadow!
— José Asunción Silva

Your love, like the wind,
never dies; in days of sea
I held you in my arms
and against the light of a golden dusk
our silhouettes were one

Your face, water or life,
dissolved the spearpoints
From our wanderings I still learn
for you live in me as I die in you

We trusted in life
until we were cut down
Sap still rises through my branches
and we were one same trunk

In you I loved, and loved eternity
It beats in me, or I in you
in the shelter of your absence
let us be one and the same shadow



EPITAPH

*We regard death as an undeserved curse
But we must not know, naive, what gives us
Until we've suffered it for a day*
—E. Spenser

If mortality or immortality concerns you,
pray for us, stranger.
Here lies Cristina, my sister.

An infant, the voice of God,
given over from her birth,
she lived to love for twenty-five months.

Brief innocence that gave rise to my story,
each day I have written since her departure.
Pale are cities, plagues, before her.

Walking through valleys and ravines,
Cristina overcame the fears
that consumed my country at war.

We deem death an undeserved curse,
yet, in our innocence, we do not know what it grants
until we have suffered it for a day.

Angels have taken her into their arms.
Love while you live, passerby.
Love, for Cristina in Christ calls you.



IN PRAISE OF HOLY DEATH

There is nothing great, nothing, but Death.
— Porfirio Barba Jacob

From the exile of what we once were,
to the dense trace of a tranquil dusk,
you too I praise, Death.

Like the child who celebrates an unexpected pardon,
like the martyr who discerns eternity in her agony,
like the condemned who proclaims her innocence.

Once, ranks trembled at your passing,
clinging to the bondage of fear,
bowing before the most cunning selfishness.

Your presence resolves all hesitation.
I scorn the fear of so many specters
and row against harsher currents.

From the desert candor of my waiting,
I await your caress woven in alabaster,
when you release this alien, presumptuous dust.

You will lead me to an immense meadow,
watered by the waters of an unsullied Ganges,
where men and animals graze together.

For before that absence which is an abyss,
you suspended me in time and space
to bear me into the bosom of the Most High.

What great reward it is for a child
to depart without the pains of this world:
without solitude, misunderstanding, or grief.

And there I sensed His blessed presence,
a joy utterly surrendered to the delight
of His ever-nearing love.

Thus, every child invoked by her mother
returns, reluctant to our weeping,
for by you she has already been born into Eden.

My heart will beat upon hearing your melody.
You will gently open the gates of my lineage
and clothe me in garments overflowing with joy.

I shall see Cristina, radiant, receiving me,
with gladiolus in her hands,
and we shall embrace as before.

Weary now of her games,
I shall see her leap from the shore
and rest serene in my lap.



CARMEN

*You, and your indulgent gaze that still can see in me
I know not what of goodness, I know not what of tenderness.*
Gérard de Nerval

On foot along the yielding paths of clay,
ever cheerful, you descended home;
two months a year you brought your presence
to quiet days within a troubled time.

Seeing you standing upon the terrace,
we crossed the streets with fervent eagerness,
to leave upon your face our burdens
and sink in yours what was most intimate in us.

In Advent feasts you nourished us,
wrapped in fragrant maize leaves,
with gestures that worked a hidden sustenance,
finer than wine and all its golden foam.

Your lively manners healed the wounds
of all who found your steadfast care;
your skirt of gladioli opened the threshold
of that garden where all form endures.

At scarcely ten years old I watched you leave;
do you remember? trembling, I told you
my voice restrained, that I loved you,
that loving you was all my earliest pulse.

Blessed, you hid affronts and grief;
of eighteen children, ten were lost;
a bishop raised his severe judgments,
and in the stone his shadow still remains.

From Guanentá, with its tempered breeze,
your golden brow was gently brushed;
your gaze, like bronze, preserved its sorrow,
your dark inviolable hair enduring.

Your voice was refuge, first mystery,
pain without lament, a silent strength;
you lived in quiet with constant pulse
the sacred burden of being always mother.

While others weave resentment and offense,
you absolve the wound with measured grace;
their power lies now in worn-out words,
your deed yields not to time's erosion.

Toward all—near or distant—you were merciful,
extending bonds with steady hand;
your daughters raised a fruitful life
and teach without the need of being understood.

Now I know you write to me from another dwelling;
I saw you among ivories and dim lights;
I still speak with you in hushed pauses,
and you lift my sorrow from tedium and weight.

Before the harshness of a wounding world,
I learn from the pure joy you leave behind,
until life gathers us once again
and I embrace you in the same memory.



ALIX

*As a child, no woman
did I hold as dear as my grandmother.*
Gabriele D'Annunzio

Growing upon our native soil we saw,
beneath the splendor of a bleeding sky,
hundreds of men and women
their torsos broken by the weight of the world.

Yet your substance was never clay, mother;
upon your shoulders, fragile as grass,
you bore our wandering gazes
to lead us from one shore to another.

Then you understood the years to come
would no longer flow through quiet waters,
that our father endured beside you
when Charalá was left behind forever.

Until then we scarcely knew your labors,
your patience in building a family;
little we knew of the depth of your love,
able to keep us afloat upon the harshest sea.

So many shipwrecks, so many falls
your hands averted day after day;
without your constancy we would not be,
nor would we have crossed those abysses.

Alix, who protects and aids the helpless—
while Alexander laid waste to cities and homes,
you sheltered Francisco, Yolanda, Mireya,
Amira, Alix, José, Beatriz, Noel.

And you breathed courage into Flavio and Ramón,
into Mercedes, into Olga, the most solitary,
whom one day you also had to bid farewell,
resigned to widowhood upon crowned altars.

Thus you overcame your grief one by one,
from your noble brother's wounded body
to the farewell of our father on Christmas Eve;
still echoes the glass of his shattered coffin.

At eighty years you guard each child;
let this be the hour to honor your victories,
let this be the hour that your lived days
illumine the battles of gentler generations.



ZORAYDA

And yet there is One who holds this falling
with infinite gentleness in His hands.
Rainer Maria Rilke

May God keep you always from affliction,
and lengthen the faithful course of your years,
and grant that I remain beside your life
when you most need a deeper shelter.

There are in life inevitable shadows,
cruelties that reach us without name,
and a slow learning of sorrow
that time places into our hands.

And if one day I go on without your voice,
without your gaze, without your assent,
my tears will rise in praise
unto her who hath watched over my life from the beginning.

For I was the one who found you after theaters,
at the dim exit of the stage,
from that step you took in Barichara
that opened in the earth the pulse of life.

In the winding sands of destiny,
amid tense and mortal footsteps,
you remain firm in presence,
and I move to the secret rhythm of your breath.

Solid and living, you never fall,
not even in the deceits of history;
I, confused in plots I cannot grasp,
name you in what I am and what I ignore.

Zorayda, ancient princess of the East,
joined to Flavio, a Roman general,
figure that in my faith becomes memory
of all in you that endures and abides.

In this illness there is a wakefulness,
the austere certainty of fragility;
love that shaped the whole of my life—
without you, what would this destiny be?



ULYSSE

You chose your passing within your home,
when fertile evening bent its course,
unthreading heaven in a slow red ember
over paths the rain had overflowed.

And when the branches of the trees,
which your sun-burnished hands had shaped,
in April and in May, ever gentle,
sprouted again like the life you sustained.

As you departed, you called us to your table,
around your food and shared drink,
as in so many other gatherings,
reconciling divided families.

And when the night fell over the meadow
you had tilled since childhood—
green witnesses of your upright strength
through the vigils of your illness—

frogs sprang forth in the springtime;
and in light leaps they crossed the air,
for you, a mysterious homage,
toward their most ancient hunter.

And in the deepest silent forests
the boar felt your departure,
without your firm, unyielding steps
upon the fertile lands of La Veze.

La Veze, April 2005

FLAVIO

Dulce decus meum
Horatio, Carm. I, 2

Sweet guardian of my days, my father.
You fall ill, and I discover your bitter distance;
once I fled, hastening, from your arms—
what did I seek? a joy akin to yours?

In vain we seem to be grown men,
abandoning first God within the soul,
and in youth, in Being, the father—
ever prodigal, yearning to return.

At the feet of the most dreadful holocaust,
before the ruins of your bloodless body,
I too beheld your face swollen with sorrow;
we were so fragile—you sustained us.

So many sufferings your shadow conceals:
that dark childhood split between two homes;
that fervent father fallen on the eve of embraces;
that constancy your foes cast aside.

The days go by, and in my nights I sense you;
each Sunday you would lead us to a park,
circled by bridges and highways,
a paradise where the sun would please us.

Diligent, after school, you brought us back
through your buildings, your crafted cityscapes;
with wine and a carefully adorned cake
you always marked our birthdays.

There were also hostile caravans,
yet you, watchful and prudent, turned them aside;
today, without you, the world suspends its joy;
perhaps one day even the sun will fade.

Within such care, immortality endures;
though forsaken, your voice returns,
like a blade of grass at summer's end,
like the moon in this afflicted night.

Bowdon, December 23, 2000





SAN PEDRO CLAVER HIGHSCHOOL

In vain you will ask after our teachers;
whoever walks again those corridors
will still hear their voices, nearly drowned
by the clamor that lives within us.

Afternoons stretched on—we were children
who thought to profane a sacred place;
all of us, or what we once were,
proved firmer than oblivion.

Twenty years have passed since then;
the sky was clear, and so the greetings,
no illness—an ocean welcomed us,
as calm as the faces that departed.

Little we knew of storms and shipwrecks;
beyond the horizon, indifferent cataclysms
lashed the cities we built together
on green tiles, between yellow walls.

The bamboo that once brushed us has gone,
like those days of triumph and correction;
gems that buccaneers of decades seized
and which today, this afternoon, we recover.

Nineteen eighty-five was not a year:
it was a victory on an open field;
passing days, and yet still present
over the valleys and forests of Bucaramanga.

Nomadic Saint Peter Claver brought me
to a brotherhood of lucid, open souls
that neither years nor sorrow could undo:
prosperous afternoons of my late childhood.

LINA

You cherished that old photograph of ours,
the one from the first day at El Diamante;
we came from an estate in Rionegro,
playing among fairies and spirits.

Before that, together in a corral,
“they do not understand us,” I would say,
pointing at the adults as they passed—
“why?” you asked without speaking.

That beautiful, forbidden memory
shows you that children are the ones
who govern every house in their language,
and in that tongue we wove our mischief.

You, six months old; I, a year and a half—
language made us adults one afternoon,
and each of us, since then, survives
in silence the mourning of Cristina.

The nineties were already passing—you recall—
when I welcomed you with a trip to the USA;
youths of many nations received you
far from a land that forged disdain.

From distant paths, always united,
we recount our feats, our griefs, our triumphs;
we are a bridge between lost worlds,
explorers of time and inner goodness.

From Bishkek to Hyderabad
I have seen every landscape with you,
from that courtyard, with the same fairies
that foretold our most fortunate lives.



WORDS THAT GAVE LIGHT AND CLARITY TO MY CHILDHOOD

After Cristina's death, my mother,
Zorayda, fell into a deep depression,
a burden that led her to the edge of cliffs.

Flavio, my father, returning from work,
prepared the table and cared for us,
and compelled her to eat, that she might live.

Years later, reviewing his papers,
I found two poems my father had written
and kept on parchment in his office;
I corrected their meter—they now belong to this book.

Hymns to Death inspire them in silence,
words that gave light and clarity to my childhood,
and kindled the faith that is itself beauty.



YOU LEFT, MY ANGEL, FROM MY SIDE

You departed, my angel, from my side;
you left this home without its “little one”;
the heaven of joy has been fulfilled
in receiving you, Janeth Cristina.

Within the house your joy has vanished,
your playful runs, your smile;
as your voice too has faded,
leaving sorrow as the only law.

It consoles me to know that you are good,
that in your home you knew understanding;
that your voice and your playful songs
were like a sun in springtime.

Your smile, your voice, and your gaze
will always be my guiding protection;
I will carry your memory at every hour
like a light within my shattered soul.



TO MY LITTLE ONE OF THE SOUL

Your memory shall be imperishable;
never did I think that in my dreamed feeling
beside you I would find what I awaited,
nor that in you what I hope would be kindled.

In your cradle I found what was most desired;
I love you so that, there, in the infinite,
I shall speak with you, in God most blessed,
with pride, Janeth, beloved daughter.

Roses I offered you in early life;
you were the image of the angel who invites
upon this earth a joy without condition,
you who gave us love without pretension.

And you left us weeping at your parting;
child of Heaven, you shall be the chosen;
amen: you are the angel of my life,
like a light within my shattered soul.



REVERIES

When you turned one year old, in dreams
I cradled you within my arms,
and as I touched you, in horror I saw
your head fall from my hands.

I cried out in the night and ran to your room,
glad to find you safe in your little bed;
that omen prepared my soul
for the cruelest grief of my life.

And after your burial, at night I returned
to the cemetery where we left you;
with a chisel I broke your gravestone,
and I saved you—you laughed, we rejoiced.

Other nights we played; yet at dawn
all that joy would turn to agony.
I still believe we meet in dreams
that each night I forget upon waking;

if not,
how could I endure your absence?



ETERNAL METAL

I read an ancient tale of a prelate
who confessed that faith and vocation were born
from fear and bitterness
at seeing his little sister die.

I too desired the sacred ministry,
and wondered whether my calling
was but to escape that suffering
which I myself had known.

I trusted, like the American poet
who invoked his beloved, that I might
see my sister born again in a daughter.

But death, sister of life,
chose to test my faith in eternity,
and took five children from my arms.

Leyla, my wife, shared with me
grief and faith in every farewell,
wounds that fuse together our lives.

Offspring who live with you, little sister,
in that serene and distant world—
there we shall arrive; each day I sing it.

ON THE GREEK BEACHES



With eyes that break the pebbles
of smiles without caviling
for every dream
of gusts of screams in the snow
of lakes we visit naked
and of rootless shadows

— Paul Éluard



DIDO

The most intense love has ended,
the one you promised me
would never end; of it now remains
only a tear in the sea.

That city everyone revered,
that happiness of ideas and hopes,
is now a barren plain
where serpents and panthers roam.

Isolated in the most tortuous tower,
without doors or chains, prestigious
because of the deepest wound,
you grow weary of a body that heals.

What bound us to the world is gone;
with it your youth died, died;
and you will have to mourn your innocence,
a warm vessel that will not return.

GAIA

Snow descended at our steps
on the edge of a frozen lake;
entwined in the mist we walked
along the boundary beyond the universe.

Below, on winter grass,
our children played without care,
swinging their future in their games;
you watched them, I urged you on in the dark.

The gulls cried out, subdued,
announcing your departure without return;
my soliloquies in sorrowful cafés,
your idylls in passing cabins.

Images, words, and coins
that eased our unrest
were sap sealing the wounds
of truncated trunks of life.

Thus we amended cities,
pointing out in each its imposture:
injury, outrage,
the spurious quintessence of progress.

Furies formed your procession;
you accused me, you condemned me, uncertain;
your maternal body slipped from my arms,
already gaunt, like an echo without return.

DEMETER

Absence is a being in me
— Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Distant, while longing for me,
do not look upon the moon for its beauty,
but upon my eyes seeking you within it.

Do not value its brightness;
remember that in my eyes you still dwell,
perennial seat of our unfinished love.

You know your absence is a being in me,
and my absence a being still in you—
Carlos Drummond de Andrade has sung it.

And though the moon shines so beautifully,
it is not its light that unsettles the world,
but your gaze burning in my dreams
since the night you gave yourself to me.

Always so absent, always so present,
the flashes of your passion exalt us
above the sphere that weds so many lovers.

And if the wind whispers my name as well,
remember that only you, the moon, and the stars
made this heart the entire universe.

PERSEPHONE

Let us obey the dark night
— Homer

No, my Lady, I was not there either;
nor did my blood run through the Elysian Fields.

Only a kiss torn from the rain
remains, watching over this stillness.

The city was destroyed, the countryside;
the firmament, annihilated.

In haste we reflected
among mausoleums and catacombs.

At home, beside blind Homer,
I asked you to trust in tomorrow—
you and I, intoxicated with hope—
and to obey the dark night.

Caught in a confused revolution,
winter lashed out, the nightingale died;
and we, no longer together, exchanged
a plate of lentils for our freedom.

We could have been a family,
we could have survived;
we never lacked what was needed—
but how to love a poet who teaches?

His songs were sirens to you;
the harpies of money circled,
and the Medusa of power hardened you
under the shelter of another dawn.



HERMIONE

The sun of what was fades today
into the darkness of my long waiting;
my beloved lies here, so near:
if you love me, why flee my life?

She wakes beside me at every hour,
she, Athenian, sovereign of all I am;
ecstasy, long desired and attained,
renouncing the regard of others.

We are embraces that end in emptiness
over unforgiving precipices;
I, a prince sent by Persia
for a library of enigmas.

And though we may treasure a future,
her barbarian friends insist:
“You are not beautiful; barbarians wed
any Greek woman for her origin.”

My sword, worn by rock,
my armor, deformed since youth,
I leave at dusk, when I return
unnoticed to my foreign beloved.

APHRODITE

In the courtyard of your house, calm,
beside the edge of the stone sidewalk,
you planted flowers with your father,
called “The Mustache,” a robust man,
fierce and irascible in bearing.

I played across the street,
beneath the shade of an almond tree,
and saw him joyful, the opposite
of what the street said of his temper.

At thirty, a towering father,
delighting in your innocence,
I did not look at you, but at your tenderness,
and without knowing, wished to take your hand

through every tremor, through every night.
Thus I glimpsed your charm, my vigilance;
thus I found, unnamed for years, unthought,
the cause of love:

a tenderness that subdues even the fiercest anger.

PALLAS

*What can I enjoy from the world
that you have not already enjoyed as a hero?
I have drunk coffee, I have tasted cakes,
I have become obsessed with a beautiful woman*

— Heine

The sun crowned her with rainbows,
gilding her form at waking;
and each time I lost myself in her,
our abyss widened within me.

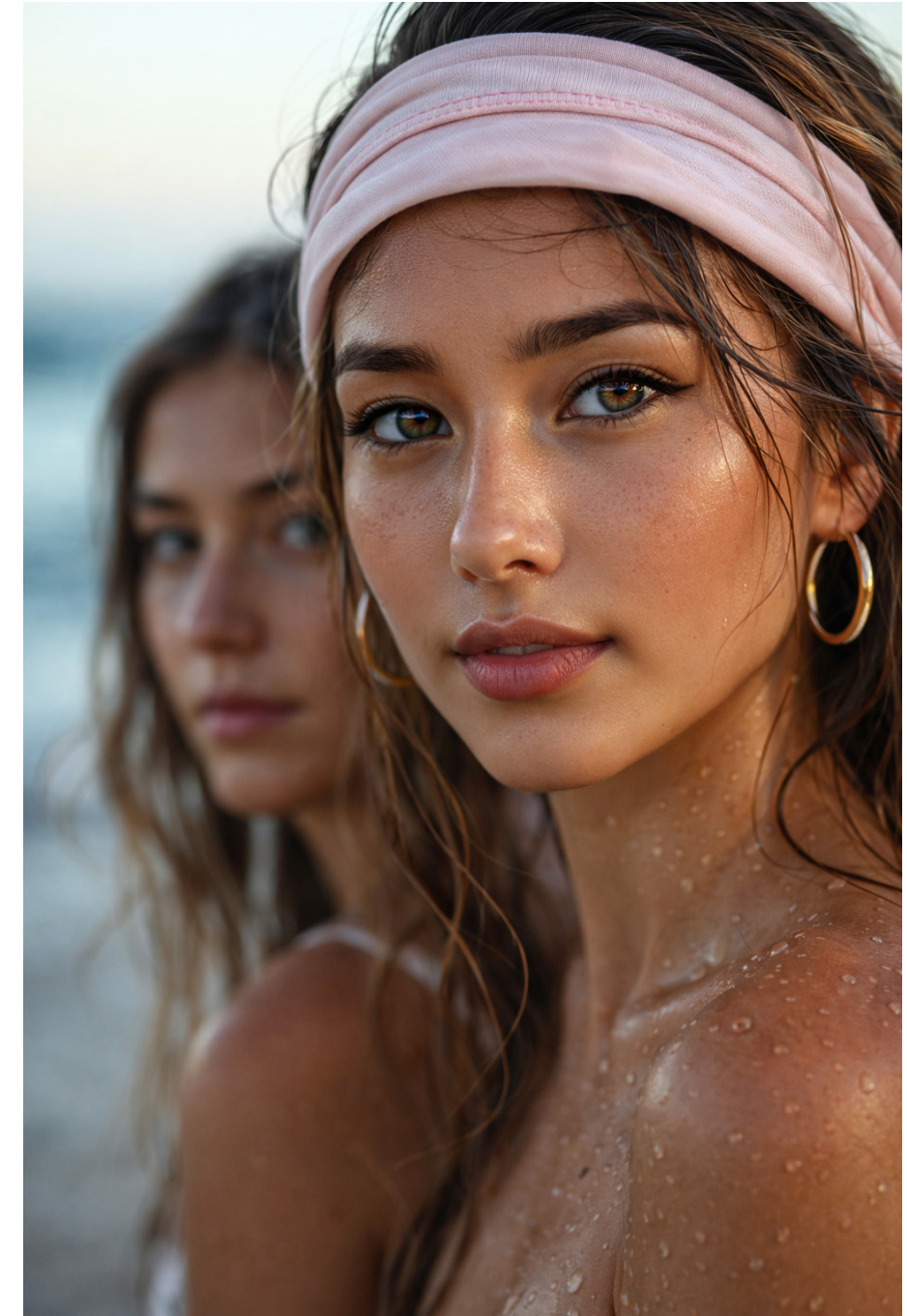
Clouds parted at her passing,
and I kissed the shadow of her back,
heightening the apprehension of the world,
its unpredictable reversals.

“What can I enjoy,” I told her,
“of a world already lived as a hero?”
echoes of Heine, to which she smiled:
“I have drunk coffee, I have loved a woman.”

Migratory birds built nests
under the assault of pale lichens,
while I contemplated her naked,
a child’s face reflected in glass.

A jealous, unhinged spirit
summoned the furious maenads;
and I, fragile, with broken hopes,
fled the green garden I had tended.

A loving star consoled me
in the calm of other landscapes;
her eyes, even if they never loved me,
will one day seek my face.



HERA

This lonely afternoon passes, and I do not find you.
In another time I held you close by the park,
your hands entwined with mine, I guided you
through neighborhoods sealed in silent strife.

By ceiba trees draped in moss,
the vanished dew floods my lashes.
Autumn dies, and beneath my steps
fallen leaves crackle with nostalgia.

Your jealousy, the arsenal of my sorrows,
your irritations, the vaguest absences.
So many days of love now drift away,
heliconias of a forest reduced to ash.

A recent world against my constant love,
feats that stole the pulse of our hearts.
You will never know the sorrow I have borne,
longed for across so many cultivated fields.

How deeply loved, strange, and missed,
surrounding me now, yesterday, uncertain.
In San Gil, city of marshes,
the coldest of landscapes.

Defenseless people, crowded and hostile,
the image to which all images return.
Our kisses ended in the sewers' flow,
to the murmur of nearby wings.

They gagged us, threw us face down;
we shaped their history, their deceits.
The final tallow before their uprising,
and you were there, you were shaken.

IPHIGENIA

*His marriage unleashes
a hurricane against you*
— Carmina Burana

We conceived the night, obedient,
in a Paris metro, like lovers;
someone insulted you, calling you indolent,
a bourgeois in a world of poverty.

The dampness of your passionate caresses
should have been mine, always mine,
but for your parents you were an offering—
a virgin priestess, profaned.

An agile bridge that proved a fragile surface,
cracked like a lifeless kiss,
so brittle that what you gave me
was a happiness drowned in uncertainty.

Our idyll stirred hurricanes;
a king's daughter, they promised you kingdoms,
and you left me to winds and waters,
to the barrenness of my useless sacrifice.

Thirty years later, the wind is cold,
and your body, worn by time,
is a rock in a furious sea
where future lovers founder.

ANDROMEDA

Dire events carried us
to Tallahassee, a cave of chimeras;
we spoke of the alienated and became alienated,
we pitied and were scorned.

My constancy traced their filth,
and they, possessed, sank their teeth;
my praises lost all substance,
and we moved on toward St. Augustine.

In the noise of a hurried car,
the fields yielded at your side
like a badly wound film,
like photographs of a broken journey.

Lodged in cardboard motels,
water concealed our affection;
under the dawns of a primitive winter
our duties separated us.

While your sadly gray eyes faded,
adorned by the moon among its clouds,
segregated, we inscribed our encounter
on the bark of sacred cedars.

ARACHNE

Then I presented myself, silent,
afraid of losing my thoughts.
Each letter, each exam, was an offering,
a declaration of love to deaf ears.

My lovers never heard
the comforts I wove with my hands,
sustenance of a fragile fist,
as fragile as time in its summers.

Dialogues in the shadow of other dialogues,
the murmur of trivial convulsions,
about excesses and perennial successes
between Trojans and their tormentors.

Of chariots that simulated twilight,
of pupils that did not fade in Aulis,
of lances broken upon the hero's skin
and ravens howling in the towers.

The death of Ajax, among so many bodies,
unfolds before a multitude of shadows,
to the rhythm of ominous monologues,
like an echo in the ruins of Mycenae.

We live from longings that tyrannize,
in Thebes, center of another bloodless body,
where the walls preserve its lament,
that of Oedipus before knowing his crime.

Suspended in my prison, I weave threads
for those who will never return.
From Aulis to Ithaca, the thread is one pain:
that of victor and vanquished,
Ulysses and Hecuba.



ANDROMACHE

*And who feels discord now or sorrow?
Love is the universe to-day
These are the slaves of dim to-morrow*
— P. B. Shelley

Along a ravaged plantation,
my hand sought your anxious face.
Sunday afternoon was fading;
tin cans rolled along the platforms.

After reading Gabriel's rebellion,
a slave who chose to die
rather than murder his masters
along the silk roads of Atlanta.

And now, who feels sorrow or discord?
Ivy and thorns had seized my solitude
before conquering your domains,
you, mistress of desolate buildings.

Fearing to begin another discord,
you feared to fall into the arms of an immigrant,
like ladies once loved by slaves.
I insisted: love is the universe of today.

The cold wind still held the vertigo
of your eyes before they fled.
Years later, you would ask me
whether constellations erode the sky.

ANTIGONE

Your departure has split time in two,
casting its shadow over the unseen,
dividing what we were
from what we will never be again.

With nostalgia I wander,
a traveler in foreign lands,
through the streets of that childhood
I never thought I would miss.

Those corners where games
remain suspended, almost unreal,
are stages of children's laughter
still echoing in obedient candor,
that immortal monotony.

Your absence, an unspeakable mourning,
like my fervent adolescence,
remains an untamable fire
consuming forests of imposed limits.

You, storm of my thoughts,
rage across this barren landscape,
and I, like any poet, tend this fragile illusion,
longing to return to the past,

to recover that smile,
to mend the silence
that wounded us so deeply.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Her ecstasy, like impious ambrosia,
is the channel that nourishes longing;
I want, and yet do not wish, to leave her kisses,
to abandon our frozen heresy.

Consumed by nights without end,
I polish her skin in the harsh light of dawn;
my heart longs to withdraw from her embrace,
yet my youth consecrates itself in her.

I flee to avoid becoming her executioner,
and exchange the bed once marked by blood and fury
for a nameless, landless barbarian slave,
renouncing her fields, her palaces.

My absence pleads for her peace, yet in vain;
to renounce what we were is torment:
a young man and a lady hidden in the rain,
entwined in the heart of Philadelphia.

Had I known how to love without precept,
had they taught me that age, like beauty,
passes; had I sensed it then,
those nights would not have seemed eternal.

HELEN

*And the fish swim in the lake
and do not even own clothing*
— E. Pound

Accusing me, you began your departure;
gladly you set out with new protectors,
leaving me in the open darkness,
bare on this shore without your embrace.

Our bridal bed is a couch without shelter,
without culmination, without illusions
your buccaneer fathers once promised.
In shadows and lament I submerge.

We knew that love contradicted
the codes that bound us,
and yet we preserved them;
when we tried to break them, we withdrew.

“Let us fulfill our duties to life,”
I said, quoting Schopenhauer;
you had not read him, and behind my back
you accused me of untimely desire.

Today the fish moves calmly in the river,
without jewels or garments that adorn it;
Ezra Pound sang it, widely praised,
also accused of ill intent.

With you I wished to flee this life
as fragile as the longing of the lover
who dreams of another body, an echo
that returns a lost ecstasy.

Pleasures distort themselves;
young, we celebrated excess,
but boredom poisons the lips.

Thus I preserve my body before the mirror,
perfection of tendons, veins, nerves,
that the salt of my tears erodes—
a form you no longer revere.



ELECTRA

The lovely memory of that maiden
— Verlaine

At last I sense your faint heartbeat;
I leave the barracks of war,
and we step out beneath a clouded sky
onto a bridge of ancient stone.

Shop windows reflect our passing forms;
amid jugglers and beggars,
we wear out our brief idyll
with wages that return us to the road.

At dusk we seek travelers' inns,
where we share our delights without rest;
at midnight you ask that we return,
when I feel the night has only begun.

I take you home, and your bitter mother
reproaches me for leading you astray;
I swear it will not happen again,
yet I know I have already broken that oath.

You sense my weary pulse, my failing breath,
and on a bench you cradle my hair;
I bury my sandals in the sand
and rest on your uneven warmth.

I knew neither your origin nor my fate,
yet that joy now fades into oblivion;
returning home, I breathe what you leave behind
and yield to the current of your veins.

MEDEA

Today, as I recover my strength,
you yield to my diminished body.
Today, as spring advances,
drying those unexpected streams.

You write in blood that you hate me,
that we loved beneath a storm,
that no vow was needed,
that fidelity was illusion.

Now our love has ended, my beloved,
with your silence before the official
to whom I was only a barbarian,
a being with the rights
of a child or a madwoman.

Though we crossed violent seas,
ruled by chiefs and masters,
experts in decrees and credentials,
condemned to know or to feign knowledge,
while you pursued your golden fleece.

The children I sacrificed
to your indifference
will return in your solitary evenings,
a quiet weight upon foreign skin
you once revered.

EURYDICE

*Cowards die many times before their deaths;
the valiant never taste of death but once*
— Shakespeare

At dawn I see from my window
passersby from Thermopylae;
they walk quickly. My stillness,
that pause of death, unsettles them.

Here we endured eleven years together;
now adversity separates us again:
you remain in Thebes, alone,
I must return to the heights of Antioch.

Years ago I walked the sands of Minos;
a lake distorted my reflection.
There, before death, only my love sustained me:
your embraces became my horizon,
my spear, my deferred refuge.

My love for you was, is, and will not be;
happy, I wandered through gardens.
In the honey of your dusk—did you love me?
Did we sicken from hopes too sweet?

You knew that man, by failing, perishes
and thus is reborn;
but you, like a patron's lover,
clung to your abandoned citadel.

You will know my gifts were subtle,
and regret your departure,
having scorned our shared history.



PENELOPE

Today's sun already fades
into the darkness of another waiting;
she no longer lies beside me,
nor grants the longed-for spring.

Nor does she wake beside me in dreams
after the bitter certainty;
strenuous currents separate us
from our cosmopolitan books.

Under this vault of sky,
among chosen stars,
our gazes strayed day by day:
I survive through wandering labors,
she thrives among new suitors.

Calm seas once held by storms,
foreign to time and its shadows;
I spend the years with enchantresses
while she unravels worn garments.

ION

Who are you, where do you come from,
beautiful woman, weightless angel,
who disturbs these calm ways
settled after the storm?

Is it the glow of a dawn
hidden in your golden cheeks?
At your side, imperceptibly,
oak leaves are reborn.

And I make my world yours
for a gesture, a semblance—
a broken happiness reclaimed,
to which I cling, shipwrecked.

Yes, I now wish to be with you,
among paramo flowers, tending
mango trees and the grass of Eden,
deciphering cicadas at dusk.

DAPHNE

Through shattered glass,
your mist crossed the rooms,
your worn garments, your woven fabrics,
and shook my fragile vessel.

At twenty-four, you overcame
the fleets of Xerxes at Salamis;
shipwrecked in the Aegean, I drowned
in waters of unbearable clarity.

Merchants seized me on the shore;
I longed for the cruelty of your phalanxes.
You, secluded in the Peloponnese,
celebrated my fall in excess.

A slave to gentler masters,
I fled to the burning dunes of the Sahara
to embrace your forms in the sand.
Neither union nor death preserved your beauty.

Your memory will wear me down slowly;
this space without depths repels me.
I will be a creature that fades
without leaving offspring.

SAPPHO

Today, before you sing,
you announce your departure.
A bitter sorrow returns,
as if I were
a recovered parchment
auctioned in the afternoons,
handed over to dealers,
to traffickers of the used.

You leave me a pain without dialogue,
without time to heal,
without another face, another gesture
in the days that remain.
From this vigil I may still
be, briefly,
a lover
for those who longed

for the return of your oblivion.

Then I set sail, Adriatic sea,
toward my Asian lineage,
toward my defiance,
toward deeds without reward.
In the calm of my vessel
I will avoid familiar cliffs.

And do not doubt
that I will find you again
in a kinder wind,
in another harbor,

or in a storm that carries me
to other forms of love.



CASSANDRA

Cassandra,
my beloved,
I expected nothing from you,
and you gave me everything: time,
the stars and the earth,
fields and cities,
the mystery of creation,
forgotten after wounds and neglect.

Thank you for your undeserved, sincere affection,
for guiding my steps
through the squares of Troy and Macedonia,
crowned by fallen empires.

Victor over neglect and indifference,
you overcame lethargy and instability.

Thank you for your first embrace after the gathering,
an oasis in a distant city.
The path was clear, the threshold of your home clear.
You foresaw shared happiness;
a lifetime would not suffice to love you.

Thank you for your words:
for you, breath passing;
for me, the scent of summer.

Your image fills each hour;
my homeland is where you dwell.

Together we write the history of every land;
between us, eternity discloses its secret.

ARIADNE

Ariadne
From the shore
I saw you along winding paths,
and you smiled without reason,
except to love the one who loved you.

You were promised,
yet you said love is free.
And I loved you, knowing
I would not be your beloved,
but the one who loved you.

“In another life you were a love interrupted,”
the priestess of Apollo told you,
“and the gods have brought you together
to restore that lost passion.

Does it lead you to paradise?” she asked.
And when you answered yes,
she urged you to consummate our encounters.

Before our union at dusk,
the horizon was mist and echo.

With your words,
so gentle, so calm,
we wove lime, salt, and canvas,
and that light in your eyes
that dissolves the night.

Neither the bird in its song
nor the twilight in its decline
will know you so radiant,
so clear.

CITIES THAT BANISHED ME



Me -- hear! My foreign Ear
The sounds of Welcome -- there!
—Emily Dickinson



BUCARAMANGA

The fate of those born in Ithaca
—Cavafy

On certain afternoons, from our shutters,
we celebrated the return of rain;
mud upon the closed transversal street,
from a ruined pasture we discovered

the watchful eye of a golden, lucid beam,
that proudly flared among the clouds;
thus we grew, in two rows of houses,
inhabited by resigned neighbors,

who cast farewells from their porches,
and in their gestures left defeat behind;
I still uncover that space in a clouded sky,
whose archaic toll prepares us

to survive incandescent through the past;
so many phrases guided us then,
that enamored pulsation
which fell sterile and dissolved into sand.

The letter I wrote to a friend,
suffering his departure after quarrel;
my ardor weighing your horizons at dusk,
my gentleness, longing for your ancestors,

which led me to ponder escape;
and love, a gift from a dying child;
the box with strings upon my shoulders,
where at times I seated my friend as well

to lead her, delirious, along the sidewalk;
the inexhaustible sorrow of her motionless body,
a tide that hurled me against reefs,
sharp, persistent in the wound.

It is the rains and tempests of the homeland
that preserve us from shipwreck;
weightless streets that foster belated years,
it is your souls from the valley of the dead

who guide my words to safer places;
I still hear the murmur of games in the west,
Bucaramanga danced as you departed,
with time my legs redeemed your rooftops.

A bastion that purged my exile, now a castle,
though other courses scatter us afar;
though your memory instructs with indolence,
the infinite springs from the first trunk.

The rival's indecision has died;
may a virgin take pity on his unrest
and teach me to endure such pain,
such burning beauty in memory.

Today in vain I exalt Rome's scaffolds,
the barren field that circles Naples,
and the broken line of Las Vegas;
upon your lime, persisting from afar.

CARTAGENA

You will never know the beauty of that dawn,
nor that your adolescence was once mine;
at fourteen, you inspired the caresses
of a man who did not yet know men.

In tender years, in uncertain palpitations,
I prolonged your festivities upon the sand;
that year expired, like so many presents,
and that night of fractured moonlight,

you had departed; agitated, I sought you
through the darkest castles and taverns;
and when I stopped, entwined, you sighed:
“our solitude is sometimes so immense.”

That night I understood, one by one,
your smiles, unfolded in their secret;
and the waves of Cartagena, as they break,
still lament the rumors of my farewell.

PALERMO

Slowly the drowned man traverses his dominions
—Cernuda

The clamor of your ruins
rises from a prostrate jungle,
of poisonous leaves and fruits;
you return, long feared,

and stab me in the flank,
drag out my kidneys, devour them,
leave your feast and abandon me
in a morgue of hardened tiles,

where nymphs weave my shroud.

My groans, my wounds enchant them,
and a heretic, forgetting her duty, heals me
with organs torn from diseased surgeons;
my coagulated lips caress her,
her nurse-like body makes me fall in love,
amber that restores lost musk.

Thus I survive, like a groomed marsh,
son of Ur, trembling cushion that longs
for a tear of pearled crystal;
sated with persecutions, you perish,
and I found our home in Babylon.
How bitter a day without your applause has been.

BOGOTÁ

What is this burdened world, this meat, this drink?
—G. Herbert

You adorn your gates with the faces of youths
beheaded by castrated mercenaries;
you summon a congress of flatterers
and legalize your murders, your seizures.

You send a jester to litigate against my house
and cast us into the darkness of serene countries,
dispossessed into the flow of a longed-for place.

We gather the scattered furies of distant kin;
indolent psalmodies animate your revels,
a funeral cortege of drunken mourners.

You guard the prosperity of Ur and Thebes
yet neglect the trade within your walls;
you protect the whim of a geographic imposition
and execute in its womb your rebellious beasts.

But the dust that creates you never dies:
it merely dissolves, like a wavering corpse.

PHILADELPHIA

An inlet of bifurcated horizons,
built beside a terracotta citadel;
a vast, celestial vault,
defiled by hesitant adventurers.

A garrison of snow-covered paths
and tombs profaned in the open air.
I saw stowaways groaning at your gates,
brutalized by an unyielding guard.

How many dismembered slaves
lie nauseous upon your sewers;
how many harlequins evade your feats,
how many persist in your racism.

Hordes of patricians and speculators
forge the misfortunes of my docile body;
then the vigor of your factories prevailed,
and we, confidants, flocked to your quarries.

From my house, a carriage with black steeds
carried me to your affluent outskirts;
a graceful maiden induced me
to labor in an unfinished tower,
accomplice to your favored ones.

I took up the lash, that abject dependence,
a pawn of shepherds and engineers
along the course of your dissolution.

From the railings of your bridges,
each Sunday they longed for revolt:
the sword of Phoenician corsairs,
the overflow of your polluted rivers.

Below, a purplish sun receded
toward the placid meadows of Numidia.

At last, moved by my dilemmas,
you handed me over to a fainthearted armada.

Outside the mysteries of your libraries,
outside the eternity of that fleeting gaze,
a port where I rested one night,
agitated by a borrowed past.

Weary of fasts and excesses,
remote—upon waking in you, awake—
crossing that avenue of flags
where another emigrant once transcribed
that all the world was a stage,
and men and women merely players.

NARBERTH

On the way back to my refuge,
across a damp and diminutive park,
I open my doors and lie down
on a bed his family prepares.

I fall asleep, and succubi and Eumenides
contend for my torments and affronts;
a howl awakens me, numb,
and hunger, thirst, and coitus lay claim to me.

From your buildings, steep reefs
torn from a comic strip
that the darkness of your night scatters:
a frailty that betrays my lacks,
sorrows yet to come, quarrels, disdain,
the ceaseless groan that morning censors.

Madness, lovelessness, brambles, the scaffold:
premonitory judgment, insistent prelude
to the frivolity of bones and towers;
the ululating passage of an unbridled spirit
that exalts the banality of my perverse days.

The sun returns me to your rarefied air;
ominous clusters darken your twilights.

CHICAGO

You draw back the porticoes of your walls
and cast me upon an infamous field;
an African host accompanies me
across ravines, lakes, and deserts.

The harmony of the landscape overwhelms me,
even as I invade a captive country;
at night I visit the dungeons and ask
my rivals their reasons.
Some lower their vulnerable heads;
others provoke me, shameless.

Merchants and prostitutes console me
with their stones, their canvases, their poisons;
defeated, I return to a foreign mass
and submit to the insults of oblivion.

I take a bus, return to a subway,
and question the joy of chance passengers;
they, discouraged, hide their gazes
behind thoughts more painful or tortuous.
I return to an attic and, candid, weigh
the glory or the infamy of a segregated journey.

I swallow crusts to persist,
for my voice—strange cadence—sets me apart.
Who takes interest in a veteran's scar?
Who esteems the exploits of Carthage?

Another day, and my hopes dissolve
over a clogged drain;
seven years, and the mailbox stands empty:
funereal, you have spurned its writing.

Wearied, you descend into another anxious night
to converse with prostitutes and merchants;
far from their achievements and their inner disputes,
your other house awaits you—
the other hell.



PORTO

Before receiving me, you laid down your sword
at the feet of a trembling, ailing city;
your desire was to visit, concupiscent, its palaces;
from our agony we implored your grace.

Like so many African fugitives who cried out
for the protection of your Portuguese slavers,
cunning, you embarked me—me, the weakest—
promising me a citadel upon still waters.

Desperate, I entrusted myself to your intrigues;
I believed in your face open to every current,
I believed in your lineage of Saracen daggers,
in the traces of my parents, my brothers.

I disembarked and kissed your austere sands;
placid, you showed me a well-adorned church
where Arab sorcerers impaled your saints;
oppressed women shrank from my gaze.

Night fell and, without scruple, you sent me
to a cell beneath your chamber, facing the sea;
thus I learned that none in your dominions was free.

Downcast, I forged my escape toward Brittany,
while, idle, you licked lard from your fingers;
upon a plank I crossed that favorable sea.

Too late you reckoned my return:
other invaders were already drawing your Fates.



BOWDON

From my bed, a shiver covered me
whenever I heard your steps;
housemates prodded me
with insidious questions,
and, inflamed, you delivered me
to the hunger of your hounds.

Your implacable palms also redeemed us;
your abuses in the corridors of a school,
your undeserved threats
that fell, one by one.

Tyrannies and democracies instilled your bitterness;
debts and promotions guided your favors.
Despising me, you taught me my own contempt;
Maenads and centaurs dismembered me in the square.

Yet the roar of a promise from the Jordan River
healed me before an unbelieving generation.
I was a seasoned cloud that came to know the sea,
an immense constellation, wandering and pale,
a brief groan that subdued eternity.

Shaken, like a shrub upon a rooftop,
I kept company with bandits and adulteresses
in asylums your enrichment annihilated;
and yet we dwelt in the most just of houses,
where neither genocides nor speculators contended.
I was only somewhat delicate; you, impatient.

CORDOBA

From my bed, a shiver covered me
whenever I heard your steps;
housemates prodded me
with insidious questions,
and, inflamed, you delivered me
to the hunger of your hounds.

Your implacable palms also redeemed us;
your abuses in the corridors of a school,
your undeserved threats
that fell, one by one.

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WORLD TRADE CENTER

September waned, solitary in each afternoon,
and tedium never overcame us; we believed then
that it sufficed to take a train in New York
to master mountains and men.

Upon entering, a uniformed woman asked us
fourteen dollars to penetrate your entrails;
neither my pride nor my mendicancy moved her:
even unemployed, we had to reach your summit.

In your elevator—the swiftest—we laughed as well,
and together we walked upon those crowded rooftops,
beneath a clear sky, supreme, fictive;
planes and boats reached your broad avenues.

Towers of Babel, summit of all nations,
refuge for the undocumented or exiled,
the hierarchy of a language, a creed, an illusion,
and yet so minute beneath that unpredictable sky.

We shared an hour with you—perhaps less—
and sent your postcards, your sparse messages;
a statue of lime collapsed, motionless upon the sea,
isolated; with other heretics we exalted you.



ALTRINCHAM

Evening descends into the spaces
of an empty street,
like a child on his tricycle
before the bombings in Ramallah.

The spirit evaporates, accompanied
by jokes conceived in brothels;
flatterers smile at their victims.

Naked, the carriages
celebrate in Rio de Janeiro;
naked, the bodies,
snared by foliage in Mozambique,
drowned beside languid vessels,
their remains reach the coasts of England.

And your gaze follows them
like a football;
you discover death in hotels,
airports, restaurants,
and, naïve, you squander your shadow,
grooming that misery with spasms.

BISHKEK

Once you were an empire of silk,
conceived in cells by visions;
workers and gifted schoolmistresses
denounced and wounded your virtues.

Once we shared your failings;
then no one heard your tragedies
of resignation, torn from you
by those who no longer endured oppression.

Your youths of darkened hair
tested in the fair their lineage;
they bent before new Saxons,
forging sororities, corrupt dealings.

Together we longed for paradise;
yet in your zeal you forged new abysses:
you threatened me and cast me into the void,
set fire to my home and failed.

Today new lies infect your wounds;
tattered, you whistle hollow threats;
intrigue intoxicates you like opium,
and you delight in the rumor that devours you.

Shameless, you bribe your visitors
to revile or to applaud them;
flattering, you offer yourself to the highest bidder,
and shift your face without memory.

You submit to the will of the prosperous,
and in servitude become a foreigner;
in garbage heaps your true sons wander,
over exhausted valleys, final victims.

Shards remain of universities,
of classrooms and ruined motels;
your name still echoes among ashes,
no longer recognizing your lineages.



LONDON

After the devastations of the Turks,
two cities the Creator granted us;
and, setting Paris aside, my consort
chose London, without hearing my plea.

I, who sacrificed my teaching
to follow her as far as Manchester,
once again returned, a migrant,
to the capital of the present century.

Which one leaves only —said Dr. Johnson—
when one has grown weary of life itself;
one month passed, two, and then the doors
of universities were closed to me.

A transhumant teacher from Asia,
after a brief journey to American soil,
I agreed to return for the one I loved,
rejecting a university offer.

And I became a doorman at Harrods,
just another worker in Marble Arch;
thus I labored for four long years,
the flower of youth fading away.

Among clothes that were never mine,
with a wife I never felt was mine,
forever psychodependent on her mother,
indolent toward me as she wore herself out.

Had I heeded my findings
in astrology in the year two thousand,
I would have accepted that she would leave me
at thirty, during my journey to America.

Adding contempt to lovelessness,
the authorities read my texts,
anathemas to politicians and figures,
in the manner of Swift and Wilde.

Irishmen who never surrendered,
and I was spied upon for two iron years;
my luggage lost or inspected,
finding no link at all with September.

At last they removed me from the Paris train,
telling me I looked like a terrorist;
I bid farewell, grateful to be chosen,
a jest for your fire-experts:

Whether chosen by police hands,
or chosen of Christ or of Allah,
or chosen of dreadful Mars,
according to their delirious conjectures.

You then chose to put me to death
on the seventh of July, two thousand five;
but before carrying out your crime,
God abandoned you, and terror came:

Foreign terrorists in your streets,
and days later you sought me again;
and you killed another innocent man,
confused by racial prejudice.

Yet in that limbo you gave me London:
thousands of books read in silence,
while I folded children's shirts,
and walks that still endure.

Through Hyde Park and Regent's Park,
like dreams time does not dissolve;
and Kensington Palace was mine,
mine your swans, your roses, your parks.



ACAPULCO

They were so alike
as the waves of a tranquil sea,
and yet so different
as the rocks that inhabit it
in its most baleful depths.

Upon the stony road
they raised clouds
that a wind of May gathered
and offered to selfish fates.

Through the oldest streets they schemed,
without their history or their anathema,
building castles
no one wished to build again.

God, through Swedenborg,
sent me to that land
so that I might give my best.
I returned as a master,
bearing solitary art,
creativity without fashions,
the spiritual thread that reveals conflicts
through stories that shake.

Before them I wrote a screenplay,
yet they believed such goodness
concealed a sinister end;
distrustful, they hurled stones
at the work constructed
until they shattered it into anathemas.

In the sinister hands that invoked them
now wanders
a current of mediocrity and underemployment,
with no land to sow,
no God to hear them as before.



PARIS

I came to you like D'Artagnan,
in the flower of my youth,
having fallen in love
with one of your beautiful maidens.

So many books and poems encouraged me
to believe that your streets were mine;
and, like Voltaire,
I corrected your astronomers,
calling them metaphysical charlatans
in an age that consumes theories
about our origin and our end,
as in the time of Anaximander.

Foretold by Nostradamus, in July
of nineteen ninety-nine
I traveled from Oporto to Charles de Gaulle,
King of terror and of kindness.

I celebrated my faith in an omnipotent Creator,
which unleashed the anger of your bourgeoisie;
on the eve of September the eleventh
you handed me over to the English invaders,
without hearing my arguments, though innocent.

I returned by divine command
to process my Hindu work visa,
and your bureaucrats delayed my stay,
offering me money laundering: a trap
that I rejected, supported by friends.

One after another, my attackers failed,
and I departed from you like Edmond Dantès,
punished by false testimonies;
I was confined in a tower,
abandoned by my maiden.

There, as you well know, I received
all the treasures of the world:
the power of Christ in Monte Cristo.



CHENNAI

It was your astrologers who summoned me,
lacqueys of the gods who, being such,
expected to obtain everything
despite their excesses.

And, like Aladdin, you offered me riches
to lock me in an abandoned tower
shared by rats and vermin.

I accepted your scorn for the sake of your knowledge,
the very knowledge denied to Aristotle
when Alexander was rejected upon your shores.

I accepted your intrigues, your humiliations,
to write the immense work
that God demanded.

In time, you discovered in me Shiva incarnated;
yet, unable to accept his communion with Dionysus,
you named me Ashwatthama, the deathless one,
and sent—as so many cunning elders do—
your children to challenge and destroy me.

At my feet your assassins knelt;
and, in despair, you sent me to other lands,
imploping others to destroy me—
as in London, where attacks by foreign terrorists
detonated before reaching my door.

You begged me to leave Hindustan;
out of respect for your age, I obeyed and departed.
Yet, when you learned I was to be wed, you conspired,
and your city was flooded by the sea.

Far from relenting, you persisted,
believing you could wrest me from me my secrets,
prevent Shiva from manifesting.

How dearly you paid for your audacity!
Making of a student your betrayer,
an illness carried him off to Hades;
from there he accuses you of having compelled him,
and reveals to me, at night, your fears.



HYDERABAD

You promised to turn actors within six months,
presenting celebrities as sages—
a fraud you thought to remedy
by hiring a pretentious American.

Your first term was a disaster;
then a former student of mine
spoke to you of my knowledge and my craft.

You hired me as you hired your laborers,
hoping to extract my secrets,
as though knowledge were a mystery
and not a gift bestowed by goodness.

And for a meager salary,
for a fifteen-day trip to Paris
and a two-story apartment with a terrace,
I agreed to train nine actors without experience.

Within a month they performed; by two, you employed them,
and, seized by envy, you sought my dismissal,
insisting that acting is not a matter of knowledge
but of talent, chance, and influence.

You ordered my death and failed seven times;
at last I departed, urged by false friends.

A year later, the celebrity so widely praised,
who had issued those orders, died,
repentant for having assailed her gods.

I wrote and acted in *God's Loop*,
a portrait of my passage through your parks.

FRANKFURT

Since adolescence I longed to travel to you,
to speak with Kant and Schopenhauer
and with their illustrious descendants,
authors of a rebuilt empire.

The cinema of Lang, Herzog, and Fassbinder
announced cosmopolitan metropolises.

Yet a Spaniard we met along the way
warned us that you despised the foreigner—
an argument that turned me from your paths.

I obeyed my father and traveled to America,
where I studied Hegel and Nietzsche.

You offered me a scholarship without stipend,
as you would to any arriviste
who sought to study within your bounds.

Only when I lived in central London
did a friend in love invite me to her wedding.

Happily, I spoke in the German
I had cultivated for so many years;
my belated gift proved an unintended offense
that excluded me from wealthier guests.

I loved your museums and your avenues,
as I already loved your history and your poems;
and life brought me three times to your streets.

The first time, a cyclist insulted me;
the second, an Arab redeemed you;

the third, a marine sought to kill me.

But the wrath of the Lord bent him at my feet;
like a severed worm, he withdrew.

Why did you conspire against me?
My protection led you to intrigue
with a footballer, a minister, and a pope.

Too late you recognized
your god Thor.



QUERÉTARO

I heard of your anguished journalists,
and, knowing that those who attack me perish,
I asked God to send me into your jaws.

A year later, a former colleague wrote
to offer me classes for your children,
offspring of millionaires, legal or otherwise.

Upon arrival, I spoke of the wonders
God had wrought in my career,
shielding me from serpents and dragons,
unaware I spoke to sons of coyotes.

Teachers began their intrigue
to prove that only locals reign,
and I was attacked by a pack in class.

One by one I closed their snapping jaws;
one by one I exposed their falsehoods.

The son of the most powerful narco
could not endure my words:
“I am a Colombian protected by God.”

And without disguise he left the room
to demand my dismissal from the directors.

I wrote a play, *Crime and Impunity*,
about wealthy youths who murder the innocent,
unaware that such had been your drama for a decade.

Terrified, you indemnified me
and ordered my departure.

The play premiered in Bogotá in 2015.

Offended, you devised an ambush
dedicated to Holy Death
and invited me to perform in Mexico City.

“It is impossible,” an actor told me,
“to organize a festival so suddenly.”

“Do not worry,” I replied,
“if their intentions are perverse,
we shall never go to Mexico City.”

Within the week, Peña Nieto canceled his summons.

A mass grave was found,
filled with dozens of mutilated students.

BACATÁ

I built your greatest cathedral:
in dreams it was revealed to me,
a tragedy in verse about your violence,
Medea Bacatá, which lacked only music;
and today that music I bestow upon you.

In you I forged the synthesis of the world:
the theatre, mirror of the globe and its creatures;
yet you were steeped in ignorance.

You believed that progressive demagogues,
who shamelessly justified the nepotism
inherited from the Spanish viceroys,
were your guides.

For that reason you denied me your palaces;
you knew my honesty was dangerous
and preferred child violators,
granting them seats in the Senate.

I had already staged The Lizards,
a farce for presidential elections,
the outrages of your servile nepotism;
and, instead of thanking me, you took offense.

A failed actor swore he would destroy me;
he is seen wandering the networks like a zombie,
fawning, without Caesar, upon a Creole Caligula.

Gustavo Petro, who ordered attacks against me,
has himself been struck by the Furies of Heaven.

I do not fear to reveal their complicities,
all their conspiracies,

all their undeserved caciques.

I am the Creator in His prophet,
the one who no longer endures such scorn,
the one who exposes crimes and corruptions.



PRAYERS



*There, Lord, you granted me a modest refuge
beneath a tranquil roof,
untouched by agitation,
where the most difficult days
fall ceaselessly, dense,
like the jam upon my teaspoon.
—Bagritsky*



GRATIA PLENA

When I incited the night,
when the tombs rose mute,
when my voice hid from me,
when she, in shadows, was dying.

When my friends humiliated me,
when we descended from the podium,
when those closest fled,
when in an embrace I was lost.

When all temples fell,
when we staged the world,
when we kept vigil over its ruins,
when sunflowers and fields burned.

When the north rose and sank,
when labors came to an end,
when disdain besieged us,
when through nightmares I departed.

When, stripped, I cried out,
when I begged at the cape,
when the spouse vanished from sight,
when alone I wandered the sea.

When we cried out in other tongues,
when hostile nations emerged,
when the law was imposed on us,
when we covered the whole night.

There, you always, in silence,
there, steadfast, you awaited me;
there, your voice and your promise,
there, silent, you always were.

DOMINUS TECUM

On weary nights I called upon you
to protect the orange tree
my ancestors had stripped bare;
it burned, and from its ashes a garden sprang.

I sensed you in winding nights,
when, guilty of removing my guilt,
I attempted to reduce the world
to its most absolute cruelty.

In you, humiliation and waiting,
a virtue cradled by time;
on the banks of a distant current,
where the sun gilded its foam,

before me you shone, serene;
each mother radiated the moon.
In your light, the flutter of birds,
the caress of the stag in your hair,

the smoothness and fragrance of the olive
are glimmers of a tranquil day.
In your serenity creation reflects,
and error becomes divisible.

Saving Pharisees and flatterers,
you share their inflicted abysses;
you console in each hesitation
the death that leaves the defeated.

Sufferings: trees bearing fruit,
facets of a refined diamond,
walls that became hives,
blood in the foam of a blue sea.

Your salt, that light which sustains us;
your presence calms the torrents;
neither mockery nor restraint
separates us now from your springs.

Encompassing the slopes of the world,
I discover your shelter in the thicket;
a shelter that even in deserts
grows with secret tenderness.

The harmony of a leaf accompanies me,
snow falling upon the grove;
the sun that soothes, reflecting its face,
restores all weariness.

Voluptuous, selfish, uncertain,
and yet your memory reconciles me
with mortality and every weakness
distilled from the vine of my sorrows.

Let the tombstones unseal their locks,
stripping rank and dominion;
resurrection happens in the lament
that cries out for the just and innocent.

Among the elements,
your shelter, the most tangible;
enduring, intact, invincible,
love, love, love without walls.

MAGALLANES

Thus also the world, then,
ends within its circumference;
in another time my breath
crossed borders with grace.

Each voyage was a daring departure,
an innocent farewell of children;
sailors nourished my efforts,
neither clouds nor dread deterred me.

At times I coveted the world,
at times I renounced it;
I lost,
perhaps I gained.
Naked you sent me,
naked I shall return.

Few will know of my embraces;
gladly I fed the seagulls,
who never questioned my past;
hungry, I might perhaps have survived.
Remove my distance, Mother;
silence corrodes each achievement,
and let my blood flow with yours,
that in paradise it may rise serene again.

No longer shall I adorn my garden,
poisoning snails at the port side;
I will now let my flowers become pasture
for those helpless creatures,
pilgrims as I am.

CONFESSION

In journeys we lose everything:
the wardrobe, a cat, a neighbor.

Laminated in mirrors and smiles,
his dressing table rests before him,
scarred by a torn poster
of four idols now deceased,
vestige of a broken tenant.

Upon its hinges, its mirror reflects
a face in the morning: a standing soul,
unbreakable in all its writing,
an image that differs from another image
which perhaps I have recreated of myself.

The precocity of my childhood,
the blows of that adolescence,
the lust of my youthful vigor,
the serene wit of maturity,
face that palpable death,
the ruin that mirrors preserve.

A woman told you that her brother
—he has been seen in the south of France—
was my Doppelgänger, a painter,
husband to a young French woman.
Now he observes my reflection,
as I observe his in this mirror.

For we dream what no one dreams anymore,
and I translate this furious current
that your precepts have decreed:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
my divinities: my Alter Ego!

ADONAI

Upon the gentle valleys of the Andes,
you alone, Adonai, saved me from the blade;
you granted me your wisdom, O Adonai.

In the wind of the highlands I sensed already
that the abyss in which I was born was not mine.

One by one we deciphered every trial,
the manna that never comes too late;
my scars bear witness to it,
moon that sustains celestial bodies.

As an adolescent I aspired to be time,
yet time, Adonai, revealed its frailty;
exiled by kindly relatives,
I delivered to the beyond what was most sublime.

Alone, distracted and wandering,
I was Hamlet, I was Prometheus, I was Shakespeare;
the most beautiful verses inflamed my desires
and the misfortunes of my youth.

Frogs croaked before sudden lights;
illusions were perfect, perfect the hope,
though night and its excesses opposed me,
one by one those wanderings stalled.

At the Pillars of Hercules I wished to be,
and I survived the poison of typhoons
that usurped my talent and fled;
the sea still keeps them in its torments.

In understanding you, there were so many joys
through the streets of Manchester and Barcelona;
I lived on thoughts, like that unknown man
who spread my words and was killed.

If upright, I was faithful to your precepts
over the fashions of Colombia, India, or Portugal;
I believed in your word and avoided intrigue,
old guardian of obsolete manners.

Compared with Mister Smith in Washington,
during the most uncertain and dangerous year,
you, Adonai, breathed strength into my defenses,
and we denounced, within bribery,
the fall of what they were and would be.

In prayer we recovered each effort,
and if I die at dawn, I return
without losing my most broken illusions:
far from me, who would care for them?

London, July 4, 2004

IN YOUR SEA

I know that before living I already chose
my destiny among typhoons and reefs;
how little aware I was of the weight
of years, when illness strikes those we love.

In vain I trusted in a passing death,
like so many ancestors who fell
to the sway of battles and elections
upon the deep valleys of Colombia.

As a child you guided me through my readings
along the streets of Montmartre and Covent Garden,
across the sands of Alexandria and Carthage,
until you left me in Stratford, by the Avon.

Great has been my faith, great its trials;
if presumptuous I abused your favors,
bowed, I now appeal to your blood:
“I have suffered for you,” you tell me; live.

You died and returned again to life
at thirty-three, denouncing
those very ones you forgave;
thus I too denounced other falsehoods,
an apprentice who only follows your steps.

London, May 28, 2005

TO THE SUICIDE

What can I expect, if all is lost?
When what I expressed
can no longer be raised upon another altar?
When the rain, once regained,
no longer shakes me and flees?
I left my garden: it lies barren.
Shall I sow what has withered
in the undertow of its indifference?
When my face is a wound?
When I imagine its courses?

I, a lover amid the storm,
a broken bottle mocked by drunkards
and cast aside by flatterers,
still feared for its edge.

Yet new days also heal.
You never abandoned David nor Solomon.
I look around and listen:
how many fall and still go on?
How many, destroyed, are not undone?

PENITENCE

Intimidated by their own desires,
the judges of Salem imposed manners
that only in breaking gave them pleasure:
hypocrisy, that original sin—
not the apple of Eden, but deception,
not the act of flesh, but wounding another's joy.

Those who play at ecstasy do not harm you,
those who love Being do not condemn you;
carnal love and conjugal love coexist
—as Emanuel Swedenborg prescribed—,
as paradise and also hell,
as wealth and poverty.

I lived a great passion, yes, I lived it;
without what in it you gave me,
I feed on the crumbs of the road
and share them with other convicts.

Yet I do not ignore the dawn,
nor the gentle symphony of evenings;
thus I stitch together my fragments
upon the anathemas of the road.

TO JESUS

If they understood your promise,
the certain paradise of your love,
of a heart forever compassionate,
I would abandon my works and my days
and walk within the world of others.

Yet I hear their sorrow and raise my voice,
and you command me to rise still higher,
so they may hear once more what is just,
not only for your sacrifice,
but for the immense work your love inspires.

What would my being be without your design?
What worth have nights of cold lethargy,
writing in Castilian verses,
as you once commanded in silence,
the visions you grant me in ecstasy?

In sleepless nights they ask me
whether it would not be better to live like others,
jesting, merely subsisting,
enduring the absurdities of oblivion,
as all do, entrusting
their hopes to their descendants.

But the Holy Spirit corrects me in dreams:
“You do rightly,” it insists;
and I heal those who suffer along the way,
without regard for their silence,
for such was your command,
and mine as well within our union:
to conceal our essence
until none may deny your return.

Judging kingdoms, striking down the wicked,
not always by deeds, but by their fate,
which together we have written for the world,
for each being, for each passing breeze,
guarding the fragile, watching over children,
and the creatures that voicelessly call to you.



EFFORTS

Along the paths of Troy and Parnassus,
all that is forged dissolves at last;
Babylon and Carthage burn together
to be reborn in their lost unhappiness.

Unaware of its chance, the world goes on;
I tasted sweetness and bitterness in a breath;
it was your creation, I was your son,
and I profaned the forbidden fruit;
and in my recklessness fell the laws,
the laws that once dictated their dominion.

I exposed the cunning in their fraud,
and loved the sorrowful, the forgotten;
I renounced the vile bribe of men,
and laws against me came collapsing
before the steadfast faith of days,
wading through the assaults of serpents.

Thus I proceed toward lofty Parnassus,
while those, vain in their striving,
sprout and perish within their ideas,
which my present denies—and your past.



CHANCE AND THE FOG



At the edge of the earth we have arrived
—Aeschylus



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WOUNDS

The afternoon passes like wallflowers upon the water,
to the rhythm of a melancholy,
and I see in chance and the fog my thorns
embedded
in wounds that living leaves upon us.



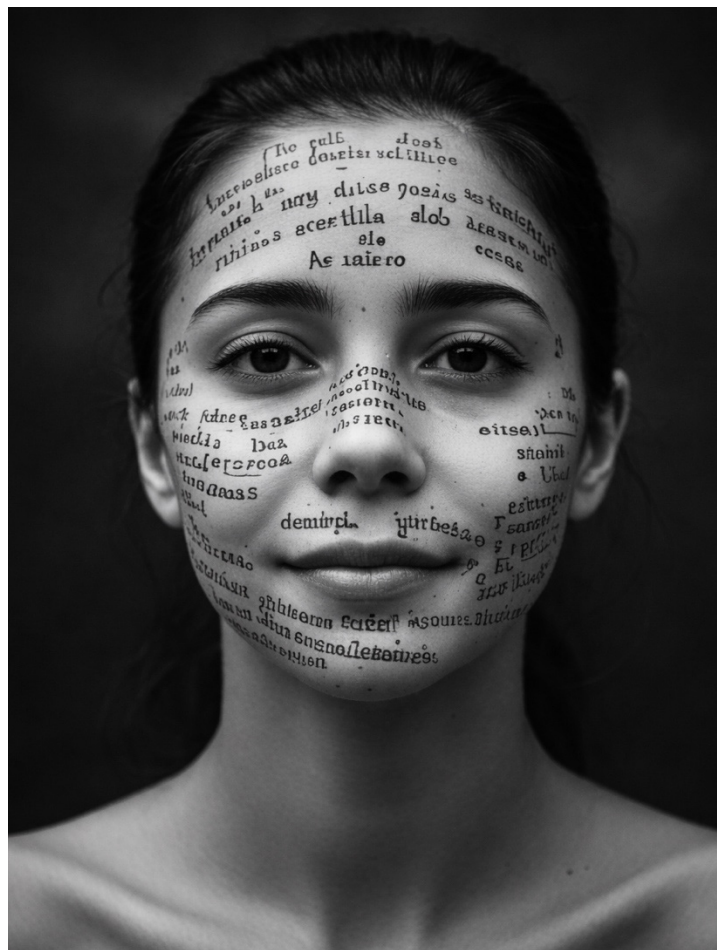
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EYES

Sadness is that bird that escapes
from the silent, dying afternoons.

A gaze, a body, a smile
that flees from pleading eyes
upon water lilies that promised to sustain us.

Vapor that slips and proclaims
that we still are what we shall no longer be.
The pubescent boy who spied on the lady of the corner
without noticing her enamored maiden.



REPROACHES

This march through upheavals
is not mere absence of honey and fragrance,
of the cloud we wove together,
of the coupling upon furtive pavements.

Medicines appease
the lamentations of an embrace,
while insects and vermin
shame this compulsion of nerves.

Not even the stars in their constant course
would have valued their battles,
for not being a shadow among shadows,
nor absence of life, a voice without harp.

Even Euripides reproached
the naivety or the ardor of the rebel.
I too might have ceased
in the lustful abysses of the Andes.

UNCERTAINTIES

Watching the windows,
longing for the months and the years,
reviewing the daily excitations,
we forge a new destiny.

A shared feijoa
leaves us upon a mistaken island,
where conception is reborn
until the final sunset.

At the edge of another kiss,
before strangers, children, relatives
and pets that roam the streets
toward abysses and accidents.

Thus we mysteriously survive,
bearing aluminum burdens
across the flowered fields of Kissimmee:
virtue, our anathema.



BARDS

Upon nebulas, night cleft,
it dismembers the visionary in delirium;
it drags him through the inflamed fissure
where time folds in its wandering.

—Is not living—he grumbles—a repeated
story without memory and without dew?
—Be rain—says the genius in his fall—,
do not embrace vanity nor dominion.

You prefer the highest and the sublime,
yet lie within the trap of wrath;
guilt and retribution! Evil redeems
him who withdraws to the dark edge.

Hooves oozing anguish
surround you with their somber breath;
the supplication resounds and strips itself
of grievances that drown in emptiness.

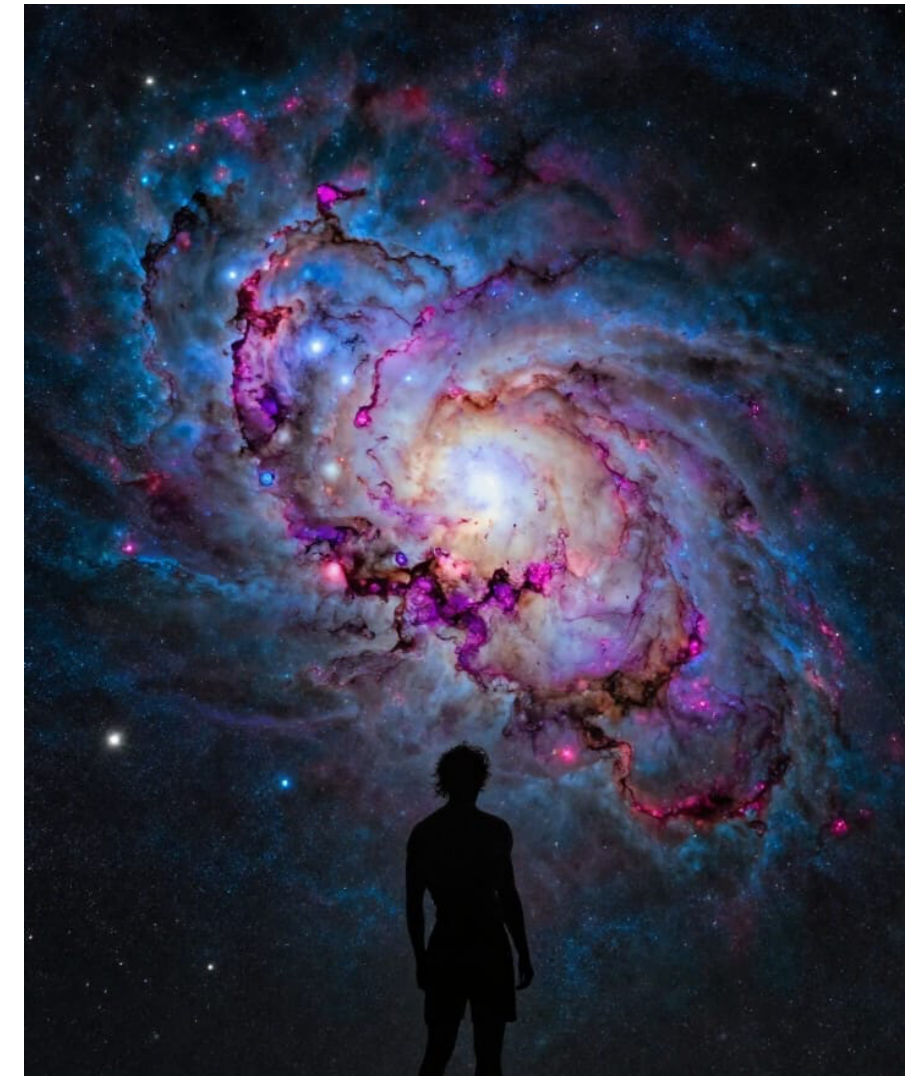
Demons flee, trembling in their wound,
goblins before a radiant breath;
and a voice, more serene and restrained,
confounds him who believes himself triumphant:

—I was man, and in man I remain,
consolation of the coming centuries;
life is a memory I offer
to the current of the Styx along its paths.

Your days shall border uncertainty,
and in perfidy you shall find your vain glory;
the false metaphysician, by habit,
shall combat the light and its memory.

Against Saint Raphael and the choir of poets
he shall oppose his chimera and his madness:
victories sustained in stratagems,
demonic perfidy in the dark night.

Passing lust seduces them,
a ruse that drags man to his evil;
but the angel, who longs for eternal light,
disdains their fleeting impiety.



CIVILIZATION

When the stars descended
to copulate with their women,
the cavemen coexisted,
akin to the gazelle, the tiger and the deer.

Our fate: to distrust a gift
and deceive the one who has offended us,
receiving little when we were generous.



ENNUI

I fall into my dreams
from tilted cages.
Green and inert caress,
autumn of a lost voice,
echo of youthful skin,
secretions that infect.

A piece of clay,
foolish like the night,
attached to strangers,
turning each bitterness into a milestone.

This flesh, this drink
soothe the nausea
that selfish maturity produces:
repetition or oblivion
to the rhythm of smoke and drink.

Here darkness is more tranquil,
akin to the sinister peace of a lie.
Here the most recalcitrant tedium
is a ritual officiated by impostors.
Here humanity ends
in Mars and Aphrodite,
in the dagger and adultery.

Other lips shall repeat
that litany you utter
until the end of farewells,
far from the house by the lake
that someone, once,
promised us.

THE PROMISE

Neither fury
nor melancholy are consolation,
only the most fortuitous memories.

I created and did not believe,
I believed and did not create,
I loved and unloved,
until I believed, created, and loved.

Perceive that you have never understood it,
or have not had the chance:
there are secrets that only affliction reveals.



COINCIDENCES

Life is not logical,
nor the dew we find at dawn.
The full moon is no accident, nor its absence:
the universe is the most beautiful absurdity,
that which conspires the rose and your presence.



SUMMERS

Men murmur humors and loves,
raise wings to new dawns,
and bulls die upon the roads,
feeding the thrones of the hollows.



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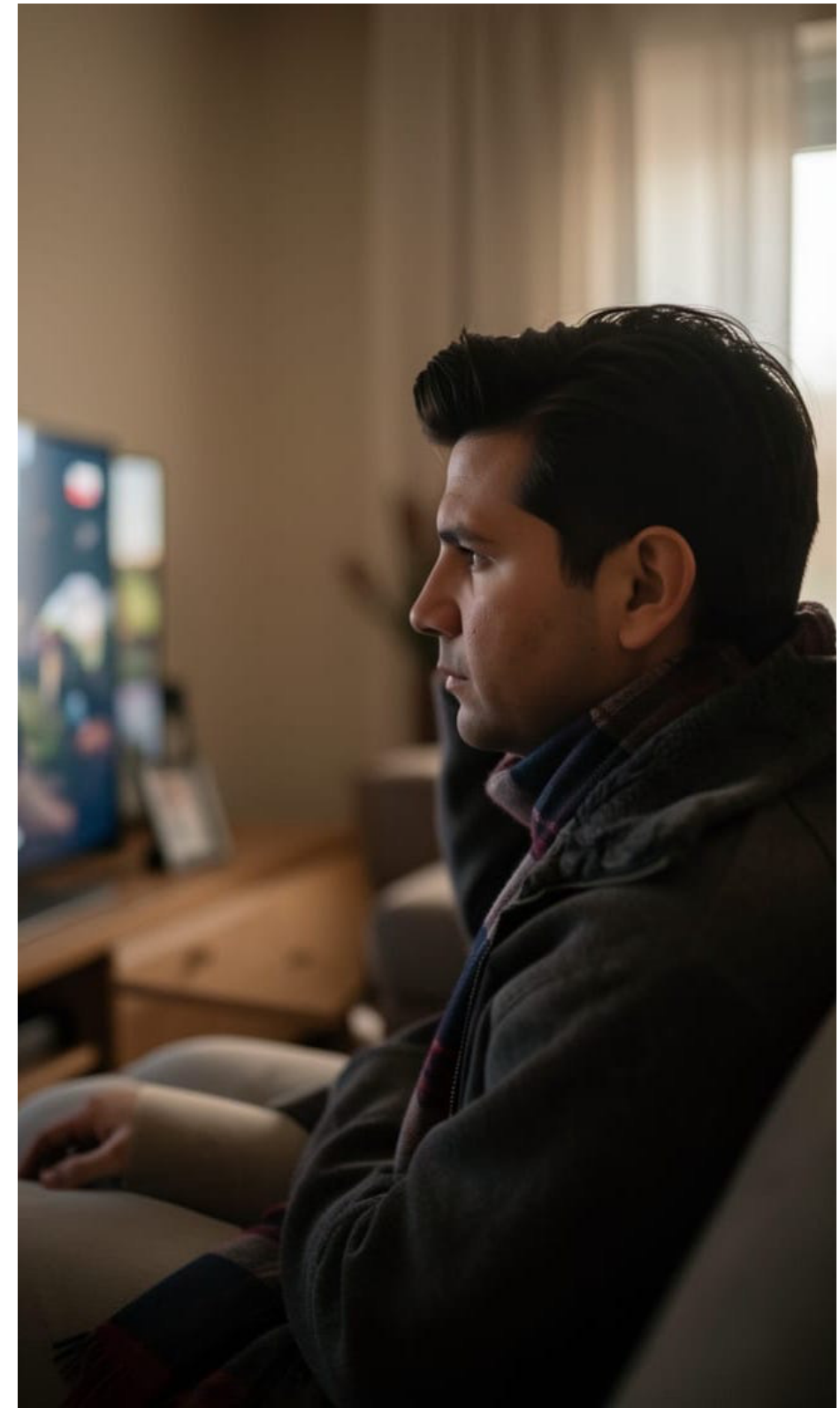
ILLUSIONS

Nights dwell within me
and in silence, before two Bibles,
upon glass we built.

Often I recover my sadness,
I frequent its dark alleyways
and relive that day,
a day as auspicious as my disillusion
or disenchantment,
when I left the underworlds and their beings,
already undone like this,
my young clay,
to board pirates who departed
in pursuit of Italian caravels,
where alienated children suffered.

If we shared worldly pleasures,
being passengers they have already passed
to the echo of immigrant cries.

It is so easy to share
an embrace in the embers of sorrow
until we learn,
after anguish and recollection,
that only our own arms
sustain us, a hymen
that shames what is past.



Proof